

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At least a couple of years before baby boomers became a regular topic in the media, I began to wonder what had happened to the collective identity and spirit of our generation. The flower power of the early seventies seemed to have wilted, I thought. Yet even as our generation was blamed for having become greedy and selfish, I sensed that below the ground of our daily preoccupations, something else was about to burst forth among us.

The calling for this book came as a desire to explore, to understand and articulate the deeper questions, motives and aspirations stirring in our midst. During interviews and research, I quickly saw that our generation is characterized by diversity but that several themes still connect us. I observed that many of us, like me, are feeling that midlife restlessness and yearning to invest some of our time and energy in making a difference. And I saw that those approaching or entering retirement are seeking a new way to re-engage in a purposeful and balanced way of life. Perfect timing! Just when our Mother Earth and its people are in dire need of caring attention and focused actions, we are about to have more time and resources than any other generation in the past.

This book features examples of men and women who have sustained or retrieved the heartfelt values and ideals of their youth. Now grounded in spiritual maturity, these people have been better able to take effective, joyful and loving actions toward the betterment of our world. Inspired by the courage and the fiery energy burning in the human spirit, I aim to help you, through this book, to reignite your own spark of creative and meaningful purpose.

While writing, I not only listened to others intently, but also had to listen in stillness and silence as never before to tap my inner guidance. This is not a book of ready-made answers or linear instructions for midlife and

beyond. Given my deep respect for the wisdom innate in the soul, I am not attempting to nudge you toward simplistic solutions, nor am I offering a seemingly clever formula to override your inner knowing. While you read this, set aside your questions about what you are to *do* and let the stories speak to your heart about ways to *be*; it is in the process of embodying our highest values that we realize ways to turn them into daily actions and positive results.

Let these pages inspire you and validate some of your deepest feelings. And at the end, the summary will help affirm your own best answers while you may choose to integrate some of the suggested practices into your life. From my learning and experience through three decades in the field of human potential development, these are practices I believe can lead to true, joyful fulfillment at this time on Earth.

During the three years it has taken to complete this book, I have felt such gratitude for the support and help I received from relatives, friends and colleagues, too many to name here. My teenage children, Misha and particularly Natasha, have been encouraging me as they looked forward to attending my book launch. I have a special indebtedness to my editor, Naomi Pauls, who graciously and patiently helped me to distil the essential messages from my first few wordy drafts. I also thank my designers, Peggy Cady, Lara Shecter and Julie Cochrane, the photographer Janet Rerecich, and the models for the cover photo, Greg Bennett and Rebecca Davies. Lastly, I feel an immense thankfulness toward all of those of who have entrusted me with their candid stories and allowed me to share them with you.

INTRODUCTION

I will always remember the summer evening when Greg and Rebecca came to the Vancouver shoreline to be photographed gazing over the luminescent horizon. While they enjoyed a moment of contemplation, I looked at them and at the golden sky. Across Burrard Inlet, the coastal mountains in the distance, wearing different shades of blue, reminded me of the diversity among us all as I stood, filled with anticipation about my writing journey. Meanwhile, Janet captured the images now embracing the pages you are about to read.

Do you recall when, like Greg, you last sat in nature and reflected on your life's path? Perhaps it has been a while since, like Rebecca, you stood facing the water, wondering what you are called to be or to do now or in the next few years. And what about our planet and the humanity it carries; what does it ask of us now? Can you hear it?

Living forward, the first part of this book's title, is not about attempting to bypass the present, nor is it about living in the future. The *now* and its wondrous possibilities remain the ground of our current reality and of our state of being. Living forward means that in the spirit of our interconnectedness, we embrace a creative orientation, knowing that we each have the capacity to shape our life and to collectively bring about a better future. And lastly, living forward means that we are mindful of our responsibilities to the Earth and its people, because we are the ancestors of our children and of the generations yet to come.

Giving back is not just about philanthropy or volunteering; it is also about contributing our truth, our wisdom, our talents and our passions in intentional and meaningful ways. Giving back, for boomers particularly, means that we are grateful for the opportunities and resources we have been given; from that gratitude comes an outflow of thankfulness in action.

This book is meant for you especially if you were born in the midpoint decades of the past century, between 1946 and 1964. By now, the eldest in this generation are entering the gateway of eldership. Others are traversing the exciting terrain of their sixth decade; yet others are moving through their forties, soon to face the most significant questions of their life. Based on my research, studies and my own personal and professional experience, this book offers my insights into the patterns, the trends and the commonality that characterize the journey of our diverse generation.

Like me, you are probably aware that we are at a crossroads in time. A time when we are all summoned to be and do what is needed for our world to become more socially and economically just, more loving and more sustainable. Clearly, we have already engaged in this complex and treacherous undertaking and it is building momentum, an inspired momentum, I would say. Numerous examples of people contributing to this great turning are included in these pages.

The first section addresses the collectivity of our generation as a whole. Chapter 2 takes you back to retrieve what we have inherited from some of our past visionary leaders. Their legacy is still with us, reverberating in our collective consciousness. And our inheritance from them is prompting us to build on the foundational and timeless truths embodied by their words and actions.

As you set foot on the inner landscape of midlife in the second section, you will be encouraged to replace the perception of this passage as a crisis with the idea of it being an exciting opportunity. To navigate it well, each of us needs introspection to tap the infinite source of guidance and life energy available within. As the psychologist Erik Erikson stated many years ago, midlife is characterized by the call of generativity: an expansive desire to care not only for ourselves and our loved ones but also by participating in the betterment of society.

Typically, as we traverse the midlife passage, we experience this “fire in the belly” urging us to show up, to liberate our greatness and to open with more audacity into the fullness of life. But after years of laboring in a workplace culture that may be incongruent with your values and deeper needs, you may need to excavate your authentic self. That inner self helps you tap new energies and retrieve your passions as you leave behind your professional life

or reorient your work life. The stories in this section shed light on some obstacles and illuminate possibilities while stimulating your generosity of spirit.

The third section explores the changing territory of “re-engagement,” still formally called retirement. This life transition can be a portal to vital new engagements, as you will see through the stories in these chapters. In this portal you will naturally be drawn to reassess your lifestyle and reaffirm the innermost values from which your renewed purpose and well-being will flourish. The questions at the end of each chapter throughout the book are meant to sharpen your awareness and generate insights while you approach or move through your own transitions and re-engagement process.

The final section explores some of the factors and dynamics that hinder or support us as we endeavor to bring about the world we so want. One chapter celebrates the timely contributions of women who are stepping forward in unprecedented numbers to lead and to take powerful, caring actions. In these pages, you will also read how women differ from men when involved in philanthropic pursuits.

The closing chapter explains what it means to *lead*, not just *leave*, a legacy in your personal and your professional life. Herein is a reminder that every thought and action has a powerful ripple effect. Furthermore, when you begin to see your life as a gift entrusted unto you, a sense of mission will naturally arise and guide you. As you uncover your next road map, your True North will point to your own balance of joyful, restorative and participatory activities in the relational community to which you belong. The last chapter also includes an integrative summary with practices that can support your creative orientation, foster your longevity, and generate numerous moments of serenity and happiness.