

Epilogue (Revised to include Nov, 2001)

I shall be like that tree, I shall die at the top. - Sir Walter Scott, *Life of Swift* (1814)

May you live all the days of your life.- Jonathan Swift

"Bingo, Walter and Jonathan, I could not have said it better," modestly trumpets the man.

"And Jon," he continues, "I hear-tell you not only lived your days well, but had lots of fun with your contemporaries without hurting anyone.....unlike most of us moderns, who in everyday dealings frequently speak with malice aforethought."

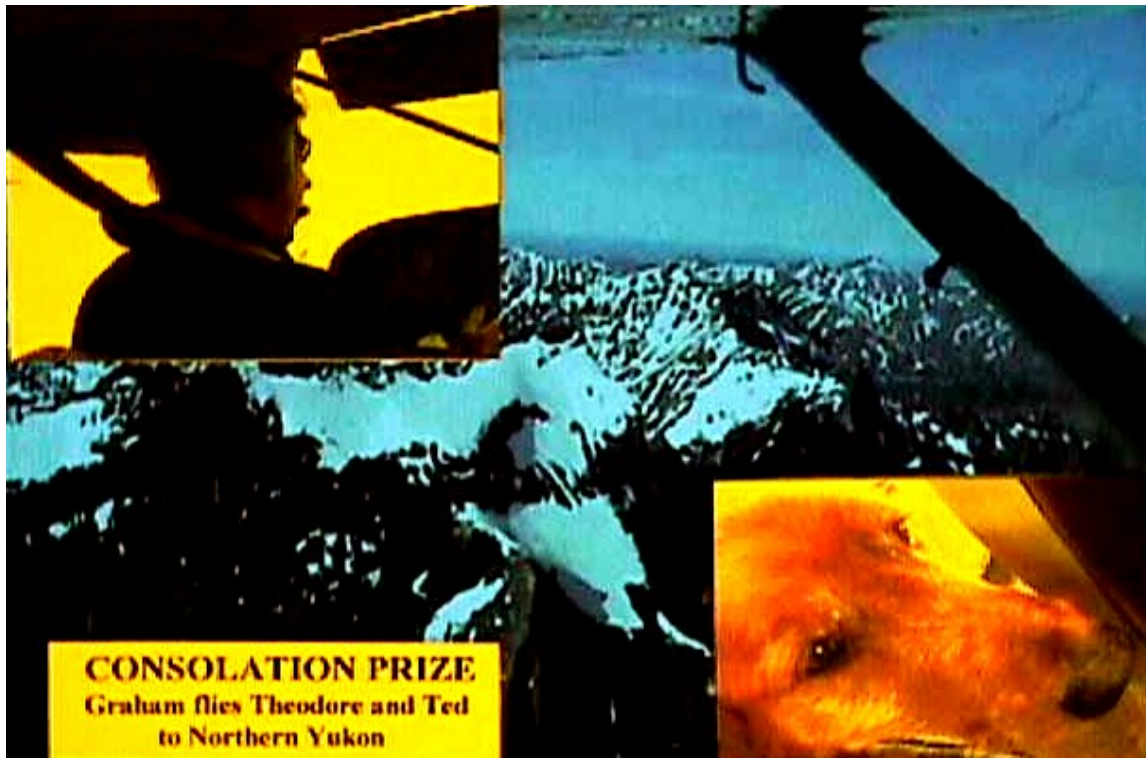
"Oh my," sighs Ed "My incorporeal bones warn me the old duffer's softening us up for some cut and slash late life wisdom. I've been in and around this guy long enough to know he never leaves laissez-faire alone."

"Never were such unpithy words so truly bespoken," applauds the man. "Almost as if you scraped the words off the tip of me tongue. No matter, let's get on with it and examine some valuable ideas accumulated along the way. Then, some well-chosen conclusions which case-hardened during my eleven-year junket."

Part 1. A friend named Gerry

Linkages have been a frequent part of the Wildegeest! story. This is a special one, a veritable icing on the cake.

In Chapter 12, the man described his disappointment and frustration in being unable to cross the flooded river at Fort McPherson, to reach their Inuvik goal. Like a spoiled child, he thought this entitled him to a consolation prize and arranged to have a pilot named Graham fly them over the spectacular scenery of the northwest Yukon Territory to a completely isolated Indian village on the Porcupine River.



The six-hour round trip provided opportunity for relaxed conversation via earphones and mikes to muffle the engine noise. Graham's knowledge and views concerning the Territory were of so much interest that the man asked if he could keep in touch. Later, he sent a letter to Simcoe near Toronto, and received a gracious acknowledgment from Graham's mother, Gerry.

Gerry is an active personable woman in her early fifties. An exchange of letters revealed much basis for friendship, and now they communicate frequently.

She sent the man a copy of her essay on aging, written to satisfy the requirements of a university sociology course, and gave him permission to select and quote certain portions. She warned that encapsulation might distort the intended meaning of some of her statements.

Part 2. Gerry's essay on aging and the elderly



Gerry - Are our senior years like a boring novel that encourages us to "skip to the end" and focus on the manner of our death rather than investing in those final chapters all the zest and interest we can muster?

The man - I have encountered many such individuals who are intent on nothing beyond their own empty lives. They are to be found in dozens of settings, rich and poor. A common denominator is their preoccupation with the medical services, the pills they receive, and the added support they think is their due.

Gerry - The dependency ratio of seniors may double in fifty years. Health care spending for those over sixty-five is four and one-half times greater than for those under sixty-five and six and one-half times greater for those over seventy-five.

The man - These statistics polarize elders and make them "different." There is need to interpret dependency ratio of elders in terms of (a) the many who are healthy and independent, (b) those who think they need help, and (c) those who really do. It is wrong to spotlight the medical needs of individual age groups instead of accepting the needs of society as a whole.

As to health care, for those sixty-five and over, and for those who are seventy-five and over, I seem to recall a statement that many of the chronic diseases that afflict

younger people are statistically less prevalent in the aged. I suggest that "health care" for the aged may be grossly misused, or overused, or overstated, in projecting what older people would actually need if encouraged to assess their requirements under friendlier conditions.

Gerry - On the plus side, the "character" of the senior population is also changing with elevated education levels, more financial stability, fewer family responsibilities, and more retirement alternatives.

The man - In Canada and the USA there is increased polarization based on income and other causes. It seems likely the above statement applies mostly to the financially advantaged.

Gerry - At present we are accustomed to a great degree of age segregation within our society, but with the swelling of the senior population the degree of interaction will no doubt increase.

The man - But population is rapidly increasing. It has been demonstrated with rats that crowding causes mental problems, not social adjustments.

Gerry - Will a "culture of aging" ever emerge? No, because there is too much individual diversity within the group. A case in point : young-old = 65 to 75, and old-old = 75 and over. Difference in degree of dependency and gender split seems to differentiate the two groups.

The man - "Viva la difference." The young-old, and even the old-old, should be more intent on keeping their minds active, achieving maturity, and less intent on playing games. "*Life is earnest, Life is real.*"

Gerry - The perception of aging is generally negative and we tend to assume both physical and mental decline after the age of 40. Reality does in part support this view since we can measure a diminution of the senses, a susceptibility to life threatening diseases, and we are able to witness the physical changes. *Dementias* are prevalent among the elderly and there is a positive correlation.

The man - This frequently encountered negative perception of aging, so often directed at healthy individuals, may be the root cause of these 'diminished senses,' and even susceptibility to life threatening diseases. I have not observed *dementias* in the "get up and go" oldsters encountered in my travels.

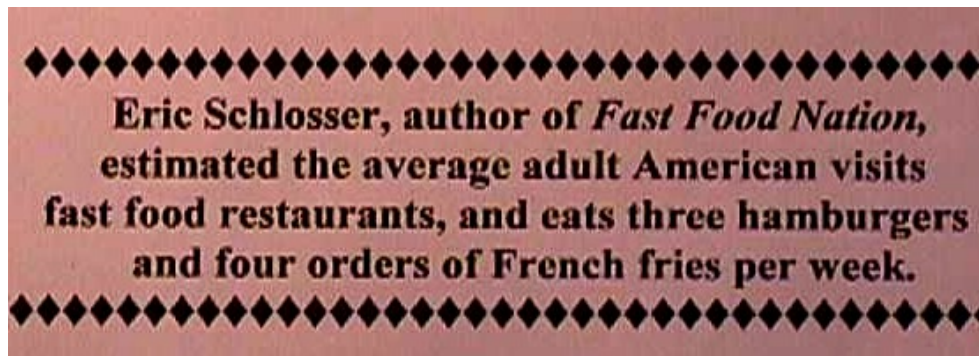
Gerry - Even though the health problems are very real, most people over 55 are not discouraged by it; 75% described their health as excellent. Income level is seen as a factor.

The man - Agreed. Those with financial resources, good nutrition, well regulated lifestyle appear to have a distinct advantage.

Gerry - The distribution of basic resources is inversely proportional to longevity. Age stratification is defined as: The unequal distribution of wealth, power and privileges among people at different stages of the life course.

The man - The results of this stratification can be observed in mixed neighborhood supermarkets: Processed junk foods, soda pop, candy, hot dogs, white flour, white bread in baskets pushed along by physically unfit, grossly overweight individuals. These are the unfortunates most likely to experience the adverse mental and physical conditions which enter into statistics that overstate the downside of aging.

Let us not forget the great numbers of younger well-heeled persons in our society who are addicted to eating habits which will increase the burden on health systems. There is much concern over increased obesity as a precursor of diabetes. Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, estimates the average adult American visits fast food restaurants (FFRs) and eats three hamburgers and four orders of french fries per week. This suicidal eating of bad food is not confined to the parents. The FFRs are programmed-fun places for children, scientifically designed by the management to implant and nurture detrimental food preferences.



Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, estimated the average adult American visits fast food restaurants, and eats three hamburgers and four orders of French fries per week.

Estimates of health care needs of any particular age group are likely to become skewed and irrelevant in a society that promiscuously contributes to its own health problems.

Gerry - The term "elderly" has taken on a negative connotation replacing the more venerated title, "elder."

The man - When society fully accepts fellow human beings of different origins, beliefs, and color---then, and only then, will society be mature enough to unconditionally accept older people without need to segregate them as "elderly" or "elders."

Gerry - Adaptability is most tested in old age. Accumulated life experience can force us to face our own mortality. How well we cope depends on social status, financial position, personality, family circumstances.

The man - The personal asset that overshadows all of the rest is a healthy body blessed with backbone, imagination and determination.

Gerry - In Canada we generally have a positive outlook.

The man - The "outsiders" generated by this kind of prejudice and discrimination include many who are relatively young. En masse these "outsiders" may add up to a majority, *the silent majority*.

Gerry - Sociologically speaking, three ways to analyze approach to aging: (a) a process of disengagement which society requires to avoid disruptions;(b) a high level of activity enhances personal satisfaction in old age; (c) opportunities are limited and access to social resources is stratified.

The man - Item (b) is a beginning, the others, dead ends.

Gerry - Historically, life was of uncertain duration, statistically spread in equal thirds over the normal life span, but now we see death as a function of old age. By rarely witnessing death, we have in effect separated it from life.

The man - Now that people live longer, statistics have shifted the burden of dying to the elderly. Expectation of death, which many people avoid witnessing, may be one reason why old people are avoided.

Gerry - Technologically, we can increase life quantitatively, which leads to debate about the quality of the way we live and our right to terminate it.

The man - A longer life carries the obligation to use it to best advantage and hopefully an active mind to decide how to end it.

Gerry - There is a theory that when people confront death there is anger, negotiation, resignation, acceptance.

The man - Let's hope without regret that time was wasted.

Gerry - With "Greying of Canada" the elderly will become more numerous and visible. Already a strain on support services, but healthier, wealthier, may lessen burden on government and national resources.

The man - Amen to that. Treat them with respect as citizens who can expect what society is obligated to provide, nothing more, but be sure the measures are adequate.

Gerry - Recent events in my own life have prompted me to see aging as a time when accumulated knowledge and wisdom can be passed on to the next generation, and a time when we can prepare our loved ones for our eventual exit. Many factors influence the quality of old age, but all are meaningless if senior years are dismissed as tiresome and meaningless. As to burden on health care system, it is as important to know the ingredients of good care as it is to dwell on consequences of poor care.

The man - In many families, it may be difficult to get the message across, unless society as a whole can be changed to play a more supportive role.

Gerry - What makes it difficult for many is lack of respect for the aged that is inherent in our culture. It is a culture that does not make us feel good about

ourselves. One man's value system (Morrie Schwartz) - measure your life, not by what you can take, but what you can give. It takes time to learn life's lessons, to consolidate them, examine, edit them.

The man - We must learn to accept Morrie Schwartz's philosophy by blending generosity and good intentions with our own individualistic value systems.

Gerry - The Inuit culture tends to respect old age. Sarah Abel lived to 102 and was a remarkable source of strength and respected guidance. She was the first woman to be elected to the "First Nation Council."

The man - Even the Inuit cultures, under the influence of first world civilization, appear to have lost much of this traditional respect for elders.

Gerry - Various sources, in discussing aging, arrive at much the same conclusions: Such concepts as gradual decline, decrepitude, huge financial consequences, societal distaste for aging, a society in which to grow old is a fearful uncertain process.

Canadians may have to rethink our heavy reliance on government resources and start asking the right questions...if ever we are to make a difference to the quality of old age we must start asking questions based on more realistic concepts of aging.

Gray Panthers maintain, we must not be adversaries of the young. We need radical change, a new agenda, and stop emphasizing need for more handouts.

Catch 22 - Age has little to do with being old, more to do with one's perception of time.

As to special problems of aging women, ie, greater financial disadvantage, more severely stereotyped. Women are beginning to insist that personality, intelligence, maturity, achievements outweigh physical appearance.

Morrie Schwartz, at seventy-eight, to the conclusion that 'Unfulfilled lives lead to a retrospective existence. When you've found meaning, going forward is exciting. To go forward, without undue restrictions, is not, I believe, an unreasonable request at any age.'

"Bravo, Gerry," says the man "Thanks for letting me have my way with your essay."

Part 3. Rosie the honor student

"Here's an inspiring, true story that was circulated on the Internet. It is about a woman who bypassed the barriers imposed by old age, entered college, and excelled," reports the man.

"If you approve, why that nasty gleam in your eye, old man?" asks Ed "Are you jealous that a smarter elder's performance exceeded yours?"

"No, Ed, I respect this wonderful person as well as the student who wrote the story. I seized upon it because he unintentionally included *examples of AGEISM*.

"Rosie was introduced as a 'little old lady.' Horrors! In this modern world it is considered divisive to refer to persons by size or age, or to call a woman a 'girl' or 'lady.'

"Rosie earned the support and approbation of her fellow students because of her abilities. The correct way was to leave her dignity intact, accept her for her intelligence and thirst for knowledge, not as a likeable old-odd-doll."

Part 4. My friend Wally

"Here's a letter from Wally, dated January 21, 2001, from Corner Brook, Newfoundland," says the man "My good fortune to have him high on my list of good friends. Wally is bravely fighting cancer. Typically, he joined a hiking club instead of some sedentary activity. Here are a few lines from his poem letter:

We are in the middle of winter.

Looking at the white stuff,

We shiver, it really hasn't been that bad.

Worse winters we sure have had.

Skidoos are going everywhere.

Walk in the woods you sometimes share,

With a skidoo, a rabbit, or a skier.

Some going fast, some going slow.

It is really enjoyable out in the woods,

Looking out over the forest where others stood.

Trees and mountains all covered with snow.

Everything in virginal white, wherever you go.

Streams of water, under snow, continue to flow.

Trees reflecting all shades of white to grey

Finches, snowbirds, bluejays add beauty to the day.



"Thanks, Wally, for letting me have a taste of what I'm missing while away from Newfoundland," says the man." As a special treat the following is one of Wally's poems, called *The Telling Storm*:

1. Night and the birds drift eastward
Moving fast.
Night and the wind swift westward
Hurls blast on blast

2. Night and star eyes glissen
Widen with fear
The clouds huddle, hushed to listen
The storm is near.

3. Night, and the waves are gripping
The rocks in vain.
And the savage lightning ripping
The dark in twain.

4. Night and the sudden quaking
Siezes the trees.
And a demon of fury waking
Lashing the seas.

5. A lily is crushed in its sleeping
and left to die.
And into the passion of weeping
Bursteth the sky.

6. Night, and my heart's wild wonder
Findeth its cry.
God of the way-out yonder
Tell me why?

Part 5. Julia's and Julian's cooking directions

"I have been enjoying Julia Child's book, *Julian's Kitchen Wisdom (2000)*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York," says the man, "since it provides many simplified techniques for producing outstanding savorous experiences, many of which are feasible while camping.

"Quick saute, as the way to cook a beef steak, pork chops, chicken or fish? Julia tells you how. If you are aware of such techniques, much can be done without recipes at hand.

"I thought about this while visiting Thelma and Julian last Monday," continues the man "Julian and I worked together for many years, so I was aware of his ability as a cook, especially in frying chicken and fish. Julian is now almost blind and deaf, so you will understand why I was both worried and curious, while I watched him prepare a whole platter of fried chicken. As North Carolinians like to say, 'It was the best I ever eat'.

"Julian explained why he considers pan frying superior to deep fat frying: Meats of most animals and poultry have distinctive species-related, sometimes unpleasant odors which he believes are quickly released by unimpeded high temperature pan frying.

"Julian!" says the man "I've known you over forty years and this is the first time you've revealed an important secret that explains your preference for pan frying, and my enjoyment thereof. I am reminded of Julia Child's sauteeing instructions, so you're in great company."

Part 6. Just my dog



"Stephanie and Jeri are my neighbors," boasts the man. "They are continually busy running Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter of which *Steph* is director.

"Last summer I received an Email which informed me that their dog, YoYo was seriously ill. Shortly thereafter, Steph sent me the following poem by an unknown author, which made me think she was about to lose him. I'm glad to report his recovery:

JUST MY DOG

He's just my dog. He is my other eyes that see above the clouds, my other ears that hear above the winds.

He has told me a thousand times over that I am his reason For being - by the way he rests against my leg, by the way he thumps his tail at my smallest smile, by the way

he shows his hurt when I leave without taking him (I think it makes him sick with worry when he is not along to care for me),

When I am wrong, he is delighted to forgive.

When I am angry he clowns to make me smile.

When I am happy, he is joy unbounded.

When I am a fool, he ignores it. When I succeed, he brags.

Without him, I am only another person.

With him, I am all powerful.

He has taught me the meaning of devotion is loyalty itself.

With him, I know the secret comfort and a private peace.

He has brought me understanding where before I was ignorant.

His head on my knee can heal my human hurts.

*His presence by my side is protection against my fears
of dark and unknown things.*

He has promised to wait for me...whenever...wherever..

In case I need him, and I expect I will, as I always have.

Who is he?..He's just - MY DOG!

"Thanks, Steph," says the man, "for this wonderful revelation concerning a depth of feeling for a dog that many of us feel, but cannot adequately express.

Part 7. The sum and its parts

"Keep this up old man," shouts Ed, "and this Epilogue will have more parts than any conceivable whole, including those 'black holes' that the scientific community has conjured up."

"Au contraire," replies the man, "The sum total of everyone's life experiences is infinitely greater than any combination we are able to relate to others."

"My, oh my, oh my," cries the man in alarm "I smell that sulfurous olfactory effulgence that precedes Jonathan Swift's psychical appearance. How now, you old manifestation, or ghost as the case may be?"



"From *ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties!* And things that go bump in the night! Good Lord deliver us," quotes the man.

"Avast country bumpkin, bumbling knave who claims he writes in my gender," sibilates Jon. "Then attend to Gulliver's parting remarks. I suggest, nay command thee - do the same:

"'Thus gentle reader,' said Gulliver, 'I have given thee a faithful history of my travels for sixteen years and above seven months wherein I have not been so studious of ornament as truth. I could perhaps, like others, have astonished you

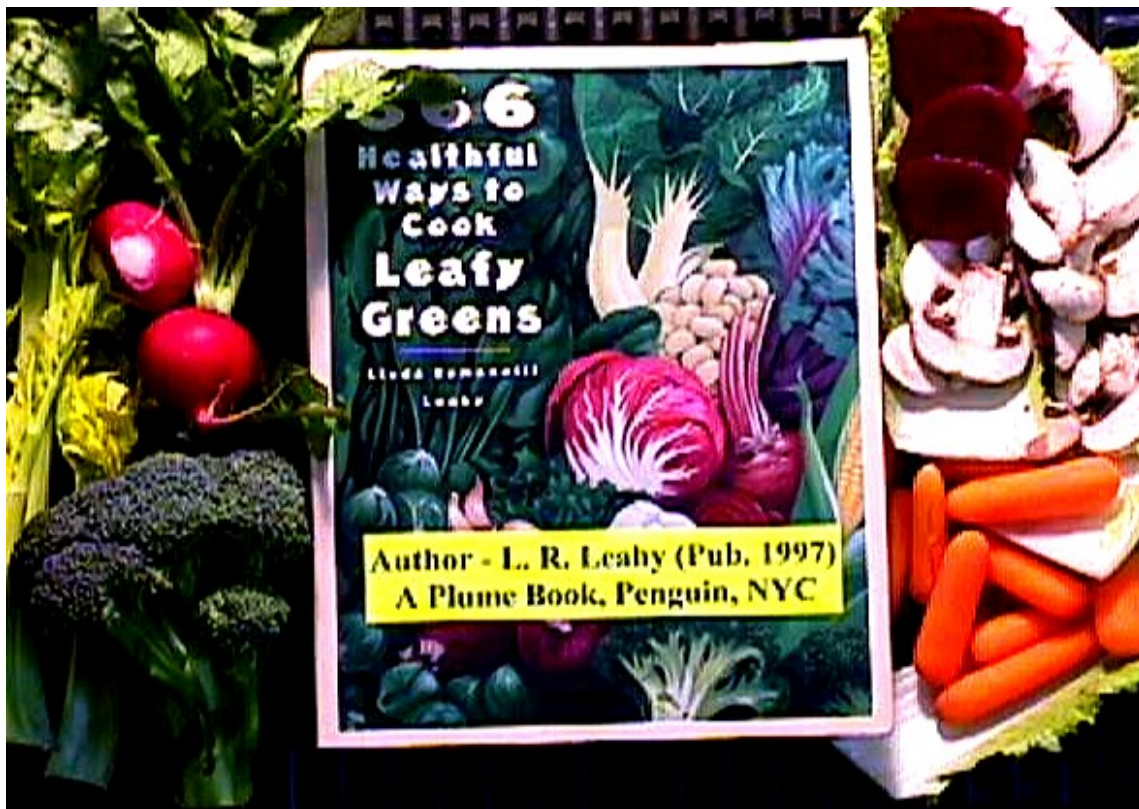
with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact, in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform, and not to amuse thee.'

"Good stuff, Oh Jonathan," exclaims the man "I was about to conclude my narrative in the same vein, concerning my completely true account of travels and experiences which lasted eleven years for me, and seven for Theodore.

"Now, I must cast reminiscence aside, end my narrative, and consider my future with Theodore, Ed, and Jonathan. There are wonderful places we long to explore, which I refuse to divulge to tourists who may then rear their ugly heads.

"There are friends in Newfoundland , others met along the way, and those at home. Even so, events have taught me that my ability to remain mobile, interested and and useful must come mostly from within. This was explained in the chapter on 'Projecting for a Life Filled with Activities.'

"In my case, what better way than to reactivate my long-standing interest in farm and marine chemurgy as applied to human and animal foods and feeds, and to produce small scale demonstrations of simple, low energy ways to produce and cook safe, pesticide and chemical-additive-free protective foods?



"But first I must determine levels of chemical residues that may remain in my own fields after so many years of being leased to commercial farmers. At the moment, these fields are covered with a beautiful crop of winter wheat, whose pristine

appearance belies, but does not allay fears that the underlying soil contains poisons dangerous to children and animals.

"I recall the perfectly groomed fields when Ken Parker farmed these acres fifty years ago, assisted by his niece, her children, and Katie the mule.

"Well, my dear departed friend Ken, I'm going to begin on the south three acres of your old farm, build a barn to house a number of projects that require a windmill, laboratory and hydroponics equipment, a test kitchen and computer center, and investigate some possibilities you never had a chance, or the urgent need to consider.

"And Sylvia, my lovely wife, who departed this place eleven years ago, I am deploying an additional anchor to keep me here, since I'll always remember that wonderful, beautiful night of the eclipse, when we agreed that for us, this was a very special place, where we would remain for the rest of our lives."

November, 2001