



Navigating Transitions in the Sixties

George Swingler

We are now free of many of your former responsibilities - and may well live 30 years longer than we expected. That's exciting! And daunting.

And is 60 really "the new 40"?

We may not have planned for this longevity and perhaps can't afford to live that long! Most of us will have to keep working after "retirement", and may not have planned for that either. How does one start again at 65 in a world that is now so different? And what if we become incapacitated?

Emotionally this can be a dark time because it becomes harder, despite predicted longevity, to deny that our deaths are moving ever closer.

This booklet covers some of the good news and the challenges of our "Third Age", and offers suggestions to help you flourish.

the**thinking**space

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Dear Reader

I hope you find this booklet useful. Please feel free to pass it on to anyone else you think might benefit.

Please remember that we are all different, and none of the suggestions will apply to everyone. Use what's helpful and disregard the rest.

I'll be delighted to receive your comments for improvement [>>Email . .](#)

There is a special 'alchemy' in having someone listening empathically and without judgement to what you are thinking [>>more..](#) Drop me a line if you'd like to supplement this booklet with in-person coaching [>>Email . .](#)

To download any of the other free 'navigation' resources (for yourself, or friends or family) [>>click below](#):

Navigation for Young Adults

Navigation in Midlife

Navigation by Journaling

Regular blog posts and/or news items are [>>just a click away](#).

And you can check out [>>My Website](#)

Bon voyage!

George

The Thinking Space

georgeswinger@gmail.com

<http://www.thethinkingspaceinternational.com>



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The good news

It's harvest time!

You have an opportunity to rearrange priorities and enjoy the fruits of your deep pool of learning, experience and perspective.

Well-being

Not only can we expect to live longer than previous generations, we can expect to *remain healthy* for longer.

Chances are you'll become *happier* too! Research is consistently finding that older people are generally happier than younger people. The psychological wellbeing [>>more...](#) of people in the USA was highest in the *oldest* group (82-85 years). Another USA study [>>more...](#) did find an eventual slight downturn in happiness, but only around 90 years of age, and it stayed higher than in early adulthood. A 2016 UK Office of National Statistics study [>>more...](#) found personal wellbeing to peak between 65 and 79, with people in the "over 90" group still happier than those in their middle years.

Older people's greater wellbeing is due mainly to fewer negative emotions. We feel less stress, anger and worry. [>> Learn more about the nuances \(TED Talk\). . .](#)

The realisation that we won't live forever paradoxically *increases* our enjoyment of life. We see priorities more clearly, and *savour* life. We smell the roses that younger people may not have seen in the anxiety and the rush.

We even seem able to love our partners better. We play fewer games, and are more open and vulnerable. The longest-running longitudinal study of human development has found that *marriages become much more contented after age 70* [>>more...](#)

Neuroplasticity

Experts believed until relatively recently that damage to neural cells could not be repaired. It is now clear that your brain *do* form new connections throughout life i.e. old dogs *can* learn new tricks.

Wisdom

Although some cognitive functions will decline as we age we'll likely still make better decisions. We identify important information better, and selectively remember that information. We also tend to be better at introspective, experience-informed thinking, so we can make fuller, more complex responses.

Spirituality

Sixty-somethings (and older) develop a greater spiritual awareness. The mystical becomes more accessible and we discover a level of gratitude that we haven't previously known.

The challenges

Ageing can nevertheless be emotionally, physically and spiritually difficult. You'll need courage to step out of your comfort zones.

Still, by shifting your perspective, a crisis can become an opportunity to rise above it. The challenge is to stay fully awake and open to the powerful, convergence of meaning and gratitude that older people can experience.

This is a time for finding meaning and for giving of yourself. A chance for deep soul-searching about what's most important at this stage of life, sometimes including a time of questioning the meaning of your life. A time to tap your dreams, make plans and continue evolving and maturing as you grow older.

And it's a time for you to leave a legacy.

Tips for the journey

Recognise the nature of the cycle

The distinctive nature of adult learning is not about *information*. It's experiential and occurs instead in cycles of *transformation*. We repeatedly weave, unravel and re-weave our lives. It's an underlying rhythm of life. [>>Blog..](#)

Look after your body

It will come in handy.

Aerobic exercise (walking, jogging, swimming, cycling) not only improves your physical health, it also reduces anxiety and depression. If you don't already have an exercise routine, now is the time to start. Begin with small steps and notice the difference within a few weeks. Click for:

[>> Physical activity guidelines for people aged 65 and over . . .](#)

[>> Physical activity guidelines for people aged 19-64 . . .](#)

Strength and flexibility (yoga, Pilates etc) are also important. For further exercises for older people, click:

[>> Strength . . .](#)

[>> Flexibility . . .](#)

[>> Balance . . .](#)

[>> Performed sitting . . .](#)

Healthy eating helps you live longer and stronger, keeps your mind sharp and keeps you feeling better. Here are 2 links that might help:

[>> Healthy eating for older adults . . .](#)

[>> "Eating on the cheap" . . .](#)

Maintain your brain

Using your brain really does help keep it in working order.

Older adults showed improved reasoning and mental processing speed *10 years after* they received 10 to 18 sessions of mental training >>more... That's equivalent to going to gym for only 5 to 10 weeks and still showing improved fitness 10 years down the line.

The trick is to keep learning new things. For example, crossword puzzles are great if you *aren't* already an expert. If you are, you should try something new like video games, or a musical instrument. Or something else. Like learning a new language or a new style of cooking or experimenting with a new hobby.

You could consider a course in a field that is all new to you. Two relatively accessible options are;

- a) >> free online courses from an array of top universities worldwide;
- b) >> courses of audio or video lectures by selected teachers (at a price).
>>Prices are much lower via a subscription option from an Amazon subsidiary, and a few lectures are available >>free from the publisher.

A further option is the >> University of the Third Age (U3A), with branches all over the world, including South Africa. It is "a learning co-operative for people in the third age" and "consists of groups of people who come together to share knowledge, skills and experience in an informal association of their own design". A major bonus is the social interaction that comes with the learning.

Stay connected

As you get older you may not have as many opportunities to socialize as you did before.

This is important because you need social interaction for physical, mental and emotional health. Social connection boosts your immune system, reduces the risks of depression, cardiovascular problems, some cancers, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis and possibly even Alzheimer's disease.

Stay in touch with friends and family, and try to visit with them regularly. Schedule regular visits with grandchildren, if applicable. Although staying in touch in person is important, phone calls, Skype, snail mail and e-mail can keep you connected too.

Find ways to stay young at heart, stimulated, busy -- and out of the house. Some ways to make new connections:

- Community and volunteer activities [>> See More . . .](#)
- Participating in activities with other seniors — a great way to make new friends.
- A group focused on activities you enjoy, such as playing cards or a book club.
- A fitness group, which has the dual benefit of physical fitness and social contact.

Play

People talk about a second childhood but it seems that our first childhoods shouldn't ever stop, at least when it comes to play. We humans have an advantage over other creatures in that we retain many more of our childlike qualities (including playfulness) into adulthood. That's partly why we're so adaptable.

Play is precious. It simultaneously creates a sense of both safety and adventure, and encourages us to adapt authentically to the outside world. Play is vital for problem solving, creativity, relationships and healing. It catalyses couples' relationships and intimacy, and can even facilitate deep connection with strangers. [>> Learn more \(TED Talk\) . . .](#)

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity.

The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.

CG Jung

So, how to play?

- It's important that play is *part of your whole life*.
- *Find the right people*. Spend time with fun friends - it's infectious. Play with kids (the experts) and your loved ones.
- You can also *talk to your dog* (especially on matters of grave political import) or *read aloud with a partner or friend*. (Some possible authors include Art Buchwald, PG Wodehouse, Bill Bryson and Herman Charles Bosman and whomever you find fun).
- Think back as far as you can to the clearest, most joyful and playful memories that you have. Build on the emotions of those memories, and ponder how they can feed into your life now.

Meditate

There are many forms of meditation. If you are not sure which type to try, mindfulness is widely applicable. It does not have a religious basis but is also used by religious people. [An eight-week course](#) has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, irritability and stress, and to improve relationships and immunity. The guided meditations used in this course are [available free online](#). So are [a similar set from another academic institution](#), and [a fuller collection](#)

Think about your death

It's healthy. Doing so actually affirms life. It transforms the energy that we all use to repress the idea of death into a greater awareness and verve for living. Fear of death is however mostly "a younger person's game" [more..](#) People in their Eighties (and older) generally have a matter-of-fact approach to dying. They don't think about it much, and far less than when they were younger.

Older people nevertheless feel a need to "tidy up" in preparation; both sorting out practical arrangements and pulling together the loose ends of their lives into a meaningful whole.

Review your story

It's normal for older people to reminisce, but it's especially important to *go one step further* and to *re-evaluate* memories. The process is called "life review" or "life repair". It can help us deal with difficult memories, successes, failures and conflicts. It's a way to recontextualise the jigsaw puzzle of our lives and create a shift in awareness that reveals hidden blessings where we thought none existed. *Forgiveness*, of others and especially of ourselves, is key.

Life review helps us find our life's unique character and meaning, and a new serenity and acceptance of the lives we have lived. Even if we cannot change who or what we were in the past, we become more able to accept it. Life review can also benefit families when loved one participate in the life review.

>>Research suggests that life review produces results comparable to cognitive behavioural therapy and antidepressant medication. It is however not recommended for everyone, including people who have undergone very traumatic experiences or have a diagnosis of psychosis.

The review can be carried out between a reviewer and therapeutic listener, or in a facilitated group, or on your own. Memories are brought to mind by reflecting on life themes and/or certain time periods of your life, and the *meanings* of the memories explored.

If you plan to do this on your own, Barbara Haight's >>Life Review and Experiencing Form will help, and you can use a journal as a tool to think things through. >> Download tips on how to use a journal.

As part of the process you might like to consider an imaginary "Testimonial Dinner to the Severe Teachers". List all the people who have wronged you in some way and invite them back into your life. Thank and bless them for the unexpected good that flowed from the hurt they inflicted on you.

What's your legacy?

Remember it's harvest time.

Not just for you but for others and the planet, as you plough back your unique learning, experience and wisdom.

What will live on after your death? Is the life you're living creating that legacy? What can you leave behind for the world of today and tomorrow?

The real authority that changes the world is an inner authority that comes from people who have lost, let go, and are re-found on a new level. These are the people who can heal, reconcile, understand, and change others.

Richard Rohr

Be a role model

People need to see maturity in the flesh before they attain it themselves. *Who you are* influences people in ways you may not see.

Be available as a mentor

Perhaps the best way to start is by quietly and expectantly listening to what younger people might share with you, blessing them in their journey of becoming more fully themselves, and seeing where that leads. *Listening* is key.

I did not go to the Maggid [great teacher] of Mezeritch to learn Torah from him, but to watch him tie his shoelaces.

Rebbe Leib Sures

Community and volunteer activities

Choose activities aligned with your values. Identifying these will take some work and research, but it's worth it, both for you and potential beneficiaries.

Depending on your circumstances, your opportunities might include:

- Volunteer activities in your community, perhaps at a school or children's organization to enjoy time with little ones and absorb some of their youthful energy;
- Commitment to your neighbourhood;
- Participation in social causes and political groups;
- Membership of professional organisations;
- Participation on non-profit boards;
- Awareness of a larger global community.

Journaling can help you to clarify your values, identify possible activities and make a final decision on what to do. [>> Download tips on how to use a journal.](#)

Explore new kinds of work

What did you love to do as a child, or want to be when you grew up? Whom do you envy? Do any activities cause you to lose track of time? Could you perhaps mould a career doing something you love or have dreamt of?

Test an impossible dream

Think back to those heady adolescent years. What were your dreams? Is now the time to try some of them again for size?

If not now, when?