

## ELDER WISDOM IN THE MOVIES

Reflections by Judy Steiert

From some of the titles of these columns, readers may be confused by the term “Elder” so here is some clarification. From my perspective and training, *An Elder is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential, and whose life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to the future. An Elder is still in pursuit of happiness, joy and pleasure, and her or his birthright to these remains intact. Moreover, an Elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations.* © The Live Oak Project, El Sobrante, CA

Based on this definition and an extensive study of recent and past movies, I offer examples where wisdom is demonstrated according to themes from the Sage-ing® program. Joan Chittister, in her book *The Gift of Years – Growing Older Gracefully* (2008) suggests there are “many dimensions of the aging process, its purpose and its challenges, its struggles and its surprises, its problems and its potential, its pain and its joys.” Her writing refers to the burdens and the blessings of these dimensions of aging. Here are only a few of the concepts referred to in her book.

**Meaning:** we come to understand that it is the quality of what we think and say that makes us valuable members of society, not how fast or busy we are. In the movie “Peaceful Warrior,” Nick Nolte plays the part of a mentor to the Dan Millman character. Through inner reflection and time, Dan is able to articulate “there is never nothing going on and there are no ordinary moments.”

**Ageism:** we are the ones whose responsibility it is to prove the stereotypes wrong, to give age its own fullness of life. In “The Bucket List,” perhaps in a somewhat exaggerated sense, Jack Nickolas’ character is able to say of his friend Carter, “that the last months of his (Carter’s) life were the best months of his...that he (Carter) saved my life and he knew it before I did.”

**Joy:** to wake up one morning and find ourselves drunk with the very thought of being alive. Then, wherever we go we will spread the joy we have finally been able to find in ourselves. The documentary style movie “Young @Heart” offers an elder presentation of the song “Staying Alive” white suit and all – a very joy-filled rendition.

**Transformation:** of the self to be, at long last, the self I have been becoming all my life – an oasis of serenity in a world gone sour on age. Dam Dass, in the movie documentary, “Fierce Grace” reflects that his stroke was like a whole new incarnation: “there are qualities that would never have come out. I am at peace more now than I have ever been. This peace comes from settling in to the moment. This moment is al right – now, this moment is alright.”

**Accomplishment:** as we continue to bring our considerable skills, experience, and insight to bear on the present needs of humankind, we will certainly become wiser, definitely spiritually stronger, and more than ever a blessing to the rest of society. Those of you who golf may appreciate the metaphor of life provided by the movie “The Legend of Bagger Vance.” “There’s a perfect shot out there that is trying to find each and every one of us. We have to get ourselves out of the way and let it choose us. Everything that is becomes one. You have to seek that place with your soul.”

**Adjustment:** being able to live so openheartedly, and to adjust so well, that others can look to us and see what being old can bring in terms of life, of goodness to make the world new again. Morrie, in the movie “Tuesdays With Morrie” tells his younger former student “aging isn’t just decay you know, it’s growth. I’ve had my time to be 22, this is my time to be 78. Fear of aging reflects lives that haven’t found meaning.” Alvin Straight in “The Straight Story” (a true story) says that “At my age I have seen all that life has to dish out. I know to separate the wheat from the chaff and let the small stuff fall away.”

I have quite an extensive list of elder wisdom movies. Email [jsteiert@shaw.ca](mailto:jsteiert@shaw.ca) if you would like a copy.