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EREMOS CONSULTING GROUP

*Facilitating Transformation for
Clergy, Congregations,
Nonprofits and their Leaders*

Serving Colorado and the Rocky
Mountain Region

On Becoming An Elder: The Great Unraveling

I'm not exactly sure what being an "elder" means, but the word and import of it has been settling into my being over the past few weeks.

Being "older" is associated with someone who is aging chronologically, but being an "elder" adds that the person is worthy of respect for his or her achievements in addition to having lived a certain amount of time. **An elder is someone who is wiser and has experienced enough of life to have a meaningful story to pass down - a story that should be listened to.** It can be used to indicate an older, influential member of a family, a tribe, or a community. Elder is also used in church circles to indicate a role which someone holds who has higher authority in that particular tradition. Depending on the tradition this could mean a special category of lay leadership or a special category of ordained ministry or priest hood.

In 2007 Nelson Mandela created an international organization called The Elders, that brings together independent world leaders as global elders "using their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide."

<http://theelders.org>

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UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH 2014

Rural Chaplains and Clergy
Caring for Veterans:
Paving the Way Home after
the Wounds of War

Virtual Conference
@MyVeHU Campus
March 18th and 20th, 2014

War has a significant impact on Veterans and their families and often chaplains and clergy members are the first to notice changes when veterans return home. The Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Rural Health is presenting

I am awed by the global elders, but certainly do not see myself as having become one of them nor do I ever see that as a possibility for me. So I'm not becoming an elder in that way. Nor does my church tradition use the term "elder" in its structure so I am not becoming an elder by virtue of assuming a role in my community of faith. Which leaves me only age and wisdom.

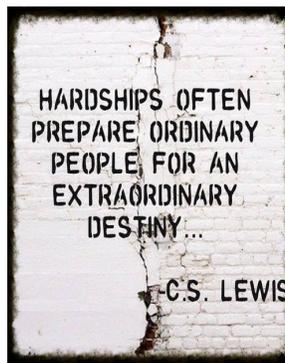


I am growing older. Several years ago I passed the auspicious benchmark where I could qualify for AARP. Recently I was somewhat surprised and curiously delighted when I discovered that I qualified for the senior discount at my neighborhood thrift store, much to the horror of my son who doesn't like the idea of aging parents. However I am not old enough yet to qualify for the similar discount at other retail establishments, to the relief of that same son.



A few weeks ago, the image and weight of "elder" came to me and began to embed itself into who I am and who I am becoming. Why now? It was after the recent death of my mother-in-law, who was the last one in that generation of my immediate family. **I am not new to death. My mother died when I was only sixteen, and she was fifty-six.** She was much too young to die. Although I knew that then, I did not fully appreciate it until I reached that same age of fifty-six and generally thought of myself as "grown," not "middle-aged" and certainly not "old".

As I now have the opportunity to be a part of my young adult children's lives in ways I never experienced with my own mother, I now think about how "young" fifty-six really is. But at the tender age of 16, I experienced an event that would forever change my life and I learned things about myself that still bear fruit today.



In the years since her death, I have experienced the death of my grandparents, aunts and uncles, and eventually my father and my father-in-law. The only two who remained were my step-mother and my mother-in-law, both in their 90's. In November of 2012 my stepmother grew too tired and so resolutely said her final goodbye. Then the turn of 2014 brought at long last, the gentle passing of my mother-in-law. **The entire generation of elders in my family**

a two-day event aimed at providing an understanding of day-to-day issues faced, the differences in military and civilian culture, what services and resources are available, and how to obtain help.

Tuesday, March 18th

Military Culture & Wounds of War

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM EST

Pastoral Care

3:00 PM - 4:30 PM EST

Thursday, March 20th

Mental Health Services & Referrals

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM EST

Building Community Partnerships

3:00 PM - 4:30 PM EST

For more information visit: <http://www.vehu.va.gov/>

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were finally gone.

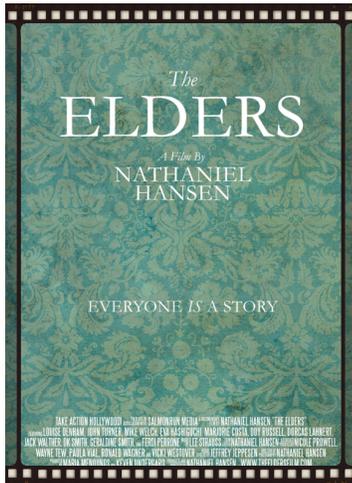
Which now leaves my husband and myself, and our generation of family, to carry the mantle of "elder". **I am just beginning to realize the heft of that mantle.**



At Ellis Island

At times, I do see myself as becoming wiser in addition to becoming older. I have lived a lot of life although I hope I have lots more to live. And I have gained experience, experiences that have proven helpful to others. Although I hesitate to call myself wise, I am aware that wisdom does show up in my life. In my professional work people seek me out and are grateful when I share my experience with them. **As a consultant I don't usually tell my story, but I do ask questions** and because of my experience I am able to occasionally point out that there is more to *their* story, which opens some vistas on their journey. My ability to see and to challenge them to view their current situation from an elder's perspective is helpful. But it's not just imparting wisdom, wisdom is also heavily intertwined with listening and really hearing others. Becoming an elder also means learning from others' stories and the wisdom and wit they demonstrate in living their life while serving their congregations and communities. **Listening to their stories makes me wiser.**

My stepmother, Louise Denham, prior to her death, was featured in a documentary film released in 2011 entitled *The Elders*.



(<http://www.theeldersfilm.com>) In it she says that in the course of her life she grew to experience the world as a "little bit bigger" than the town in Texas where she grew up. **Then she said an amazing thing. "That's been a great unraveling. And where there is unraveling of life you begin to be interested in things and see things from a different perspective."**



She also wisely said, "Everybody not only has a story, everybody is a story. You are creating your own story everyday of your life just by living."

(Click quote to hear partial interview of my stepmother, Louise)

Unraveling has occurred in my own life, including in my work with clergy and congregations. As I have lived my life, the

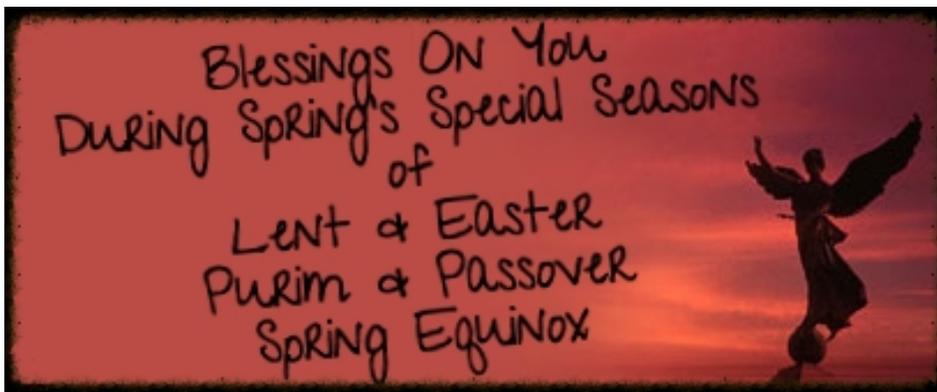
unraveling has led to losses as well as new opportunities and experiences. Some additional strands have pulled loose in the past few weeks, and as they did the word "elder" began to emerge. **With sadness, as well as some regrets and discomfort, and yet with a desire and yearning to live up to the mantle that is being passed along, my life story continues to unravel in ways that are opening vistas.** The expanding vista calls me to explore more than just what it means to become *older*, but to explore what it means to become an *elder*.

And so it begins.

Peace,
Elizabeth



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