

BEAUTY

Beautiful are the youth
whose rich emotions flash and burn,
whose lithe bodies filled with energy and grace
sway in their happy dance of life;

and beautiful likewise are the mature
who have learned compassion and patience, charity and wisdom,
 though they
be rarer far than beautiful youth.

But most beautiful and most rare is a gracious old age
which has drawn from life the skill to take its varied strands:
 the harsh
advance of age, the pang of grief,
the passing of dear friends, the loss of strength,
and with fresh insight weave them
into a rich and gracious pattern all its own.

 This is the greatest skill of all,
to take the bitter with the sweet and make it beautiful,
to take the whole of life in all its moods,
its strengths and weaknesses,
and of the whole make one great and celestial harmony.

Robert Terry Weston

The other evening, Marilyn (my friend and neighbor here at Songaia) and I facilitated our community women's sharing circle for the month of January. We had decided to request support from our neighbors for a year of discovery toward initiation as an Elder in our community of Songaia. We have shared our roles as 2 of the shoppers and organizers of our community food service for nearly 6 years and have discovered a passion in the challenge of food purchasing, preparation and education toward a more sustainable food growing and eating pattern. We see this as our focus within the elder dynamic of Songaia. Our circle included all but one of the community women and included several rounds of sharing stories of elder women we knew or knew about. One question was about the way our US culture views elders – silence reigned, and I realized that we had made a paradigm shift in seeing each other and elder women in general as having great value, and were not ready to speak of the pain and isolation that continues to be in our world for elders. A couple of years ago our youngest woman in the community wrote a paper about the elder women in our community. The four of us over 60 and this young woman spent a couple of hours sharing our lives in response to her questions about every facet of living in relationship and in community. It was an awesome experience for all of us as she realized through her writing how appreciative she was for having us older women in her life.

There is a dynamic called Senior Cohousing on the horizon and it is growing in popularity quickly in the U.S. This concept helps Fred and I to realize how much we love being part of a multigenerational (www.songaia.com) community with its richness of children's voices singing, their beautiful agile bodies flying by on their scooters along with their watching their challenges of learning the skills of living in community. It is wonderful and challenging to learn to flex and share with parents of young children and parents of young adults.

This growing older is a very interesting experience. The above poetry really speaks to me as I tend to have a romantic view of aging. This poem puts into words the reality yet it does so with such beauty. Of course, the romantic piece grows old when the aches and pains, loss of hearing and agility, and illness shows up as a matter of course.