**Late Life Design – The Matter of Time**

**Introduction**

 In my 80 past years of living, I’ve tried to bring facets of my life together to set my course and set a timeline. The longer I live and the shorter the time ahead, the more I treasure the time remaining, the more I find the need to use my time in a more measured and thoughtful way.

 And so it is – in the first month of another year, I find myself immersed in trying again to take responsibility for who I am and what I do.

 Why? Because I do believe the way I spend time matters.

 Putting together my Late Life Design has helped me chart my course

 I have always been a goal setter and list maker sorting out my priorities day by day and year by year. making room in my life to be by myself to read and plan, to be with family and friends and to engage with groups, especially those who work with and assist elders or keep me growing.

 COVID time has increased my alone time and given me reason to pause and reset my course. I had to develop an entirely new set of technology and social media skills to stay in touch with people and groups outside my home. I learned how quickly things outside myself can take control of what I do. These times have strengthened my resolve to find the best path for my journey into rest of my life. As I move into 2022, it seems creating a design for the next 10 years might keep me centered on what I most value. And so it is - so long as my brain and body provide me the ability to think and move.

 Assisting me is a counselor, I’ve chosen one who knows how to ask the right questions for keeping me from taking on too much and yet challenging me both use the talents I have and to keep learning. To get me started she gave me a list of 120 values and told me to narrow them to 10. After much thought I chose only three: appreciating, balancing, and contributing. I placed these at the top of my Late Life Design on the next page. They are the attitudes I hold – a central ABCs to for my living.

* ***Appreciating*** – is my underlying response to all of life. It is a richer attitude than gratitude for the good things. It is a sense of how all of life’s joys and sorrows are part of the whole and being open to whatever and whoever crosses my path and learn from whatever happens. It is an enjoyment of what is along with a drive to understand the world and others who’s take on life is far different than mine.
* ***Balancing*** – is a discerning when to retreat to restore my energy, when to reach out to family and friends, and when to use the talents I’m given to engage with and contribute to the larger community
* ***Contributing*** – is the sense of calling within me to give in return for all I have been given, and to share what talents I have as long as I am able.

The pictorial design on the next page brings the elements of my life together whether I am alone, with family or friends, or in community settings. The page after the picture describes how the design helps me integrate and make sense of how the myriad aspects of my life fit together.

***Late Life Design***

***Appreciating, Balancing, Contributing (ABC)***

**Environment & Time**

**Community**

**One to One - time**

*Culture*

**Alone**

*Patterns*

*Groups*

*Friends*

*FriendsdsNDS*

*Family*

*Organizations*

**Vocation *- Calling* - *Older Adults: Writing About, Working With***

**Description of the Elements of My Late Life Design**

*Creating a design and centering myself as I look at the design helps be aware of the world I live in and helps me find my place within it. Here is what I see when I look at my Late Life Design.*

**Environment and Time are** placed in the upper right-hand corner outside the circles. These factors operate in the background yet come to awareness as they affect aspects of my life. Time as it moves, shapes my planning. I have least control over these elements. I adapt to them as they shape what I do and when.

**The circle’s rims** are drawn not solid, but permeable. What I do in one circle affects every other circle and even the outer circle cannot be protected from the larger environment and times I live within.

**Within the circles** are what I see as having a measure of choice and control over as I plan.

**The middle circle I call Alone Time.** I have the most control over this time in what I do or habits I create. I now have a pattern of rising at 4am to have 4 hours before breakfast to spend reading, planning, walking, and creating what I want to contribute. Other alone time during the day is less consistent but I am aware of when I need to retreat to reflect and gain strength.

**The middle circle of time I spend in one-to-one relationships.** Family and friends and personsI choose to be with or choose to be with me. Right now, daily I spend time with my husband and youngest son who share the house with me. Right now there are three I friendships I work to sustain. Others persons I come to know or wish to know me, build over time.

**Community is the outer circle.** It contains the groups I belong to with predictable meeting times. They set the timelines and avenues for my ***contributing*** to life. The most predominant now are the Senior Services for South Sound and Dawn Talkers, a chapter of Toastmasters International. These are the only two I engage in weekly. Another group, essential to my calling is my monthly writing group. A small group of six, we encourage the writing abilities of one another. I have yet to decide how much energy I have to engage with other communities than I now have.

**At the bottom of the page is Vocation-calling.** Vocation is what I feel called to contribute, given the talents I have. For me it is working with and writing about elders.

* At the senior centers as a volunteer Resource Advocate, I assist elders in connecting with resources they need for living. Two groups I enjoy facilitating are the Low Vision Group, and Owning the Age I Am. Both groups assist elders in finding their strengths and continuing abilities.
* Writing is a central enjoyment I’ve found as life ahead shortens. Through writing my memoir I find my own place in life. When writing creative non-fiction, I tell the stories of the elders I’ve known. Poetry gives me an opportunity to express my appreciation of all aspects of life.
* So many people older than I have been my mentors. Persons whose stories I have read have nurtured me. The activities at senior centers, and sharing my writing are the avenues I have found to contribute to the lives of others as they have contributed and continue to contribute to my own.

 **When I place activities within the design,** I feel less fragmented, fractured. It helps me reflect on when I need to sit back and *appreciate* the moment and when my energy allows me to move toward *contributing*. Kind of a *balancing act*, like a dance or placing pieces to fit in the puzzle of life. The picture keeps me conscious of the values and attitudes that center me. It helps me shape my alone time, find time for family and friends, and reach out to the community I live within. It assists me in using this well this time beyond my 80th year – to do what I can for as long as I am able.