

On Approaching My Hundredth Year

By

Katherine Bradway

I was born in November, 1910, at our family home in Milwaukee, a midwife attending. That was frequent in those days. At three months of age, I almost died of double pneumonia. When the doctor made his morning visit, he found my mother in tears, and he put his arm around her. "She was a nice baby," he said kindly. Baby was still alive! My grandmother had saved my life by putting her fingers down my throat and pulling out the phlegm that was choking me.

Here I am, soon to reach my hundredth year. The best thing about getting old is the accumulation of friends. Some people collect stamps and some people collect coins, but the finest collection of all is friends, especially at this age. Because of my visual handicap, I no longer can read the printed word, even large print, but I have six wonderful women friends who come and read to me regularly. That is a blessing. And the second best blessing for me is that my wishes are given top priority. People don't expect much of me at this age, so I can say "no" to lots of things without seeming to be too negative.

I have lived in the same home, designed by my husband, for the last fifty years. My neighbors have become close friends, more than just neighbors. Some of my best friends are also colleagues, who keep me updated on what is going on in the professional organizations that I belong to.

One of the events of the day is when the mail comes, and if there's a personal card or letter, that is always a very welcome happening. I'd recommend to anyone who wants to do something for an older friend to send a card once in a while.

Getting old is not easy. Why do they call it "growing old?" They should say "declining old."

When we're young, we are growing, but as we become old, we fade, just as flowers fade. Young people seek challenges: getting on the baseball team, swimming across the lake, even climbing a mountain. As you get older, challenges are given to you—multifold. Meeting challenges replaces seeking challenges.

Threading a needle is a huge challenge that I gave up on long ago. Reading the daily paper, then just reading the headlines. Walking with a cane and then finally, no more independent walking, getting around with a walker or in a wheelchair. These challenges keep coming, unbidden.

Sometimes it's hard to rise to the occasion, but I am always glad when I do. When the Jung Institute of San Francisco recently announced that they were having an Ancestors' Day, honoring another ninety-plus woman member and me as their special guests, I thought I could not go because of the danger of climbing the stairs into the building. I felt that I just did not have the energy. After much urging, however, I did agree to go. The institute arranged for two strong men members to help me up the stairs, and my wheelchair waited for me at the top. I had dictated something to be read by someone else, since I could not read the print myself. Instead of staying the two hours I had planned, I stayed three hours and thoroughly enjoyed myself.

It is increasingly difficult, however, to find the energy to do this sort of thing. But when I make the effort, I am always happy that I did.

I've had a full life. In 1963 I became a Jungian Analyst and was a founding member of C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco. I also studied Sand Play Therapy with Dora Kalf and became a founding member of the International Society for Sand Play Therapy. I am fortunate to have had many of my articles appear in professional journals, and currently I'm working with a colleague at the University of Southern California in making a follow-up study of subjects I tested in 1942 for my doctoral dissertation.

I am meeting each new challenge as it comes, all made easier with my priceless collection of wonderful, dear friends.