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The Creative Spirit: A Path to Wisdom

by Andrea Sherman and Marsha Weiner

“Measure our days, teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom.”—Psalm 90:12

This biblical psalm suggests that it is wise for us to consider the preciousness of time. In this article, we reflect on the life works of two women—Florida Scott-Maxwell and Barbara Myerhoff. Each claimed the poetry of this psalm to frame their mid- and late-life creative offerings.

Scott-Maxwell lived into her 10th decade. Myerhoff’s days numbered just 50 years. Both women looked open-heartedly and realistically at aging. Their writings and creative thinking are filled with inspiring insights and guidance to number our days, so that we may acquire some wisdom.

“I want to tell people approaching and perhaps fearing age that it is a time of discovery. If they say ‘Of what?’ I can only answer, ‘We must each find out for ourselves, otherwise it won’t be a discovery.’”—Florida Scott-Maxwell, *The Measure of My Days*, when 80 years old.

Scott-Maxwell wrote short stories and plays, was active in the cause of women’s rights and, at age 45, studied with Carl Jung and became an analytical psychologist. In her later years Florida sketched, tried her hand at various crafts and kept a notebook.

Excerpts of the notebook provide the substance of *The Measure of My Days*, which features her musings on the present, reflections on her past and speculations about the future. With the craft of a playwright and the insights of a Jungian therapist, Florida pulls us towards her and inward, closer to our own inner experience.

She is honest: “I am so busy being old that I dread interruptions.”

Her candor is liberating: “Age puzzles me. I thought it was a quiet time. My 70s were interesting, and fairly serene, but my 80s are passionate. I grow more passionate as I age.”

And her intimate insights *invite* the reader into aging: “My kitchen linoleum is so black and shiny that I waltz while I wait for the kettle to boil. This pleasure is for the old who live alone. The others must vanish into their expected role.”

The notebook is Maxwell’s passport, stamped with the different states of consciousness she bravely traveled. We benefit from every nuance of thought, every tug of memory, each pang of anxiety about the future, and every awe-struck,

perplexing moment she wrote down. Her passport is our ticket to travel as she traveled—onward, to discover.

In contrast to Florida's bold introspection, Myerhoff's inquiry into the societal role of ritual in the lives of older adults is the forefront of her legacy: "Ritual always delivers a message about continuity ... Rituals and ceremonies are cultural mirrors, opportunities for presenting collective knowledge."—Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*.

As a creative act, ritual is our collective, ancient, creative response to the existential aspects of life. Ritual is where imagination is manifested with drama, poetry, music, decoration, movement, story and memory.

Myerhoff was deeply sensitive to the lack of ritual in the second half of life. Her creative legacy is a theoretical framework that defines the value of ritual for older adults, and the use of stories as "equipment for living."

Both Maxwell and Myerhoff exemplify Gene Cohen's "liberation phase" of the second half of life. They share bold and honest insights that are substantial contributions to help us all measure and number our days.

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