



# LAUCKS FOUNDATION

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**"If a man be encouraged to set out for the truths of social situations, he discovers justice; if he seek the truths of personal relationships, he discovers honesty, respect and love; probing the meaning of philosophical and religious abstractions, he comes to know more of the breadth and depth of man's idealism."**

*Henry Geiger*

**"The writer's real obligation is to the reality of things; only secondarily can he be a partisan."**

*John Cogley*

**"When we break through the obsession with youth and the denial of age, then we can begin to deal with the reality of this new third of life and its termination in death, and we will deal with it simply as a part of our whole human existence."**

*Betty Friedan*

*The following is an excerpt from "CHILDREN...and Ourselves." MANAS Feb.16,1955. p.5.  
(From the writings of Henry Geiger, founder, and for over 40 years until his death a few years ago, publisher and editor of MANAS.)*

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"The highest function of education can, we, think, be expressed without difficulty. It is, quite simply, to encourage the young to set out for the truth. Not a particular truth, either religious or scientific, but the truth of any and every matter which is presented to their consciousness: the truths of social situations, the truths of personal relationships, the truths of abstractions in religion and philosophy. If a man be encouraged to set out for the truths of social situations, he discovers justice; if he seek the truths of personal relationships, he discovers honesty, respect and love; probing the meaning of philosophical and religious abstractions, he comes to know more of the breadth and depth of man's idealism.

"Of course, inevitably, the one in search of all these truths discovers a full measure of injustice while discovering justice; finds fear, possessiveness and hate in the contacts of men and women; and encounters hypocrisy and self-righteousness among the votaries of religion--and some doctrines to encourage these qualities. Still, the youth who knows enough to set out for truth knows all he will ever need to know of happiness. For it is while one is striking out that he brings into play his full range of faculties: his mind, his intuition, courage in the face of anger aroused by those whom the truth seems to threaten, and patience when others wilfully ignore whatever of the truth he has discovered.

"Then, too, unlike other endeavors we are accustomed to describe as "life works," this quest can never be brought to a conclusion. Success in the quest is perpetual, or it is not at all. No one suddenly discovers he has gone as far as he can, coming to face with sorry bravado the emptiness of a dream fulfilled. For the setting out for truth is no dream, nor is it an abstraction. Everywhere around us are words, claims, power struggles--hates and greeds mixed with loves and generousities--and nary a device for distinguishing one from the other. None, that is, save the desire to do so, which is what we are actually talking about.

"Once in a while, it is said that men who set out for the truth grow tired. Tired of standing up for it when other people avert their faces, or abuse the one who insists on stating his position. Apparently something of the sort has occurred again and again among those who have defended unpopular social, economic and political causes; the term "tired radical" is appropriate for those who eventually fall by the wayside, men whom we can more easily excuse for a measure of bitterness than anyone else. But, according to the viewpoint we are now exploring, the political radicals who thus become tired--courageous and uncompromising though their record may be--have never learned quite enough about "setting out for the truth." For the political idealist, unfortunately, usually becomes a partisan, and somewhere along the way his partisanship substitutes itself for his desire for the truth. And if one pins his hopes, again and again, upon the success of a venture which never comes off on schedule, the resulting disappointments will most assuredly drain away psychic energy, and drip a little gall on the outer coverings of the soul. What the political enthusiasts forget is that the truth doesn't have any sort of schedule, that it has nothing to do with immediate attainments, but only something to do with immediate strivings. The few who realize this distinction become, at one and the same time, "existentialists" who live fully in the moment, and believers in immortality, who touch the timeless. We cannot exhaust the situations in which truth needs discovering. Nor do we have to discover *all* of the truth to know that our direction is significant."

## THE LAST WORD

### What is bothering me

JOHN COGLEY

**I**'ll tell you what is bothering me. How does a writer keep himself from getting such a vested interest in certain ideas that he feels called upon to come to their rescue when they are attacked, mainly because he feels that an attack on them is an attack on him?

In the beginning a writer is like a blank piece of paper. But if you want to be a writer you have to write about something, and you begin to take positions on questions of the day. You study a situation and try to see it whole; you think about the issues involved and weigh them; finally you reach a conclusion. You set down your conclusions on paper. One conclusion leads to another. Once you are known for the kind of conclusions you habitually reach, you are assigned to what is called a school of thought.

No one registers for a school of thought; the matriculation is gradual. But even the most independent minds discover one day that, lo, they are wearing an old school tie. Maybe the tie is called liberal, maybe conservative, maybe middle-of-the-road; it does not matter much. The important thing is that one's thinking is now regarded as part of a group effort. The writer begins to think of Us one way and of Them another way. He begins to feel a tug of loyalty every time he sits down to a typewriter. It is not necessarily loyalty to the truth but to a partisan interest, for the writer, who never intended to, has become a partisan and can very easily find himself affected with a partisan's view of things.

The writer does not necessarily become a liar, though some do. But if he finds himself paring and shaping the truth he deals with, for the good of the "cause"—however nebulous the cause might be—he is the next thing to a liar. Worst of all, of course, he can deceive himself. He can tell himself that he is justified in withholding this truth and playing up that—for after

all should he give aid to the enemy or scandal to the little ones? Or he may deceive himself that he is preserving a respectful silence out of consideration for the transcendent claims of a higher truth. The Truth which is the Party, the Movement, or the Cause makes its claim, and the separate truths which are the description of immediate realities are slightly distorted and even flatly denied. How many liars have lied for Truth? Only the totalitarians endow deception of this kind with the dignity of doctrine; but even honest men are bedeviled by the temptation.

This is not the kind of column in which one should mention names. I will not cite examples. But study the work of journalists, especially those who deal in ideas. How many are like campaign orators? All wisdom is found in their camp. The opposition never has a case; its position is not the product of earnest study or careful attention to the facts—it is the fruit of blind prejudice at best and callous iniquity at worst. The truth, they lead you to believe, finds its only servants in their camp—and, *mirabile dictu*, it just happens that the truth in any given instance serves their partisan interests.

I do not hold with the conspiracy thesis. I do not believe that writers are bought out by powerful interests. Very few can be bought if only because, for the kind of people who become writers, pride is a much greater temptation than greed. But buying them would not be necessary in any case.

The *National Review* speaks of the Liberal Establishment, which I take it is not supposed to be a conspiracy but a product of mindless conformity. The so-called Right Wing is often described as an Establishment along the same lines. There is a grain of fact in the charge that such establishments exist. Each establishment, of course, tries to give the impression that its existence is explained by the hold that truth has on good men who

can think, while the other evolved from witless men plunging beyond their depth. But suppose we dismiss such *partis pris* absurdities for the moment and ask why such establishments do exist.

I think they exist, among other reasons, because writers tend to get this vested interest in certain ideas, as do magazine and newspaper editors, and come to feel as protective about them as a doting parent.

Unless ideas, even well-thought-out ideas, are the product of infallibility, there is usually some truth to be found in the attacks made on them. Nor are factual truths always of immediate service to even the best ideas. So a truly honest writer must root for the opposing team now and then; he may even find that a sincere devotion to the truth will turn him temporarily into a traitor to the partisan cause. He may find from time to time that he has to cross the lines on a specific issue, to the dismay and disapproval of those who had thought of him as one of "ours." But if the writer wants to stay honest he has no other choice. Reality simply does not shape itself, nor should it be shaped, to conform to even the most noble cause.

In the long run the writer's real obligation is to the reality of things; only secondarily can he be a partisan. The honest writer, I am afraid, will always be an untrustworthy partisan. But such are the appeals and the claims of partisanship that only few writers realize when they have ceased to be honest.

That is what is bothering me. □

*John Cogley (1916-1976) was a Commonweal editor from 1949 to 1955, a columnist until 1964. Later he served as an editor at the New York Times, as presidential campaign adviser for John F. Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, and as founding editor of The Center Magazine. This column is reprinted from the issue of November 15, 1957. page 4.*

The following excerpt from "Aging and Death in the Youth Culture," an interview with Betty Friedan, is reprinted with permission from **NEW PERSPECTIVES QUARTERLY** Winter 1994, pp. 31-33. (A publication of The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 10951 W. Pico Blvd., L.A. CA. 90064)

## Aging and Death in the Youth Culture

**BETTY FRIEDAN** AUTHOR OF THE SEMINAL BOOK *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), BETTY FRIEDAN HAS AGAIN BROKEN NEW GROUND WITH *The Fountain of Age* (1993). BETTY FRIEDAN WAS INTERVIEWED BY NPQ'S ASSOCIATE EDITOR LEILA CONNERS IN NEW YORK CITY.

**NPQ** | What does it mean to grow old in America? Why does America shun age?

**BETTY FRIEDAN** | The mystique of age—the utter dread of programmed deterioration from youth to decay, decline and pathology, defining age only as personal disease and problem for society—is most extreme in America. Our national denial and denigration of age has prevented us from viewing it as a new period of human life. Instead, growing old is an unspeakable, unthinkable fate. Our horror of age stems from our obsession with youth; the cult of youth is the strongest here.

America is a nation of immigrants, of the young and hearty that left the old country and went West in the wagon trains. And for the children of immigrants, what could their grandparents teach them? Then came the baby boom population explosion after World War II just as the mass media began to exert its profound influence. A generation took shape that didn't trust anyone over 30, viewed 40 as traumatic, and 50 unthinkable.

The image of age in America is a terrifying blank. Except for a few rich, powerful men in ads and newsmagazines, we cannot look on the face of age. Even ads selling women anti-age cream and youth dew use models in their 20s. In studies of magazines, television and movies, I found virtually no image of anyone over 65 doing anything any American would like to do.

Newspapers and newsmagazines across the country only discuss the "problem with age," the growing hordes of people refusing to die after 60, 70 or even 80, senile unproductive older men and women seen only as a burden on society and the young. Even at gerontology conferences, the focus is on senility and nursing homes; while way down in the basement is a single rogue, underground workshop on creativity in the later years.

Given this absolute lack of any positive image of age, no wonder we all deny our age and say "I may be 65, but inside I am only 17." But that doesn't work. After the fifth face lift, we don't look young,

we look like mummies—inhuman. Denial results in increasing rage, rage at ourselves because we are not young. And this rage prevents us from recognizing the real possibilities of this new period of human life.

At the turn of the century life expectancy of women was 46, now it is nearly 80; for men it was 45, now it is over 72. With that new third of human life, we have to be pioneers of a new kind of age. There is a difference between those who continue to grow and develop—vital aging—and those who deteriorate and decline. It doesn't have to be a rare Grandma Moses and Pablo Picasso; I found people all across this country who do continue to grow and who no longer seek the fountain of youth and are finding the fountain of age. Even women and men recovering from stroke, or living with arthritis or heart bypass can achieve this mode of vital aging. From all the research and my interviews the key to vital age seems to be purposes and projects and bonds of intimacy which require that older people remain a part of the larger, living, changing community.

**NPQ** | How would you, then, redefine age?

**FRIEDAN** | The personhood of age is an unmapped road of new possibilities. If people can resist the mystique of deterioration—which can be self-fulfilling—people may be able to escape the adult playpen and the communities of old people walled off in the middle of the desert, kept far out of sight. If we can outgrow the obsession with youth, men and women can move into age and become more whole, more themselves. They become more comfortable with their mistakes. They have had their troubles, pain, tragedies and triumphs. They accept themselves as they are and they find themselves released from belaboring the traumas of their childhood, the sorrows of their youth and the inhibitions and fears of their adolescence. And now they can be liberated from the things that drove them in their middle years. People no longer have to be superwoman and superman. There can be a sense of new possibilities and adventure. We also become truth-tellers, which is not always comfortable for those around us.

**NPQ** | Most other societies look to their elders for guidance; Americans don't often do that.

**FRIEDAN** | Americans are not accustomed to the word "wisdom" because the denial of age has

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been so extreme in America. But we are ready for a paradigm shift in consciousness that takes into account an 80-year lifespan. We don't have to continue to be structured in terms of a lifespan of the past, there can be a whole different patterning and structure of work. Today, women and men of their

late 20s to 40s have enormous career pressures, working 60–80 hour weeks through their childbearing years; and yet we have a rigid timeclock that pushes people over 65 out of the workplace when they still have an enormous amount to give. Studies show that young people would rather have more flexibility and more autonomy in their worklives than a wage increase or benefits.

A shorter workweek and options of jobsharing and flextime as an alternative to downsizing would meet the needs of women and men in their childbearing years and also enable new uses of the experience and wisdom of those over 65 in the workplace. Companies smart enough to adjust will reap bonanzas of enormous talent at their disposal.

**NPQ** | In your book, *The Fountain of Age*, you dispel the myth that old age is an illness; that, instead, age is a new phase of human life. Yet in old age, issues of health care and cure are more pronounced.

**FRIEDAN** | The mystique of age, of old people being inevitably sick, senile and terminal, is not true. It is surprising to discover that only five percent of people over 65 have Alzheimer's, only five percent are senile, only five percent are in nursing homes at any one time and less than 10 percent will ever be. We need a paradigm shift in health care implied by the premises that age itself is not disease; that the older person, body and soul, becomes more and more her/himself, authentic and whole, unique and integrated, and can't be treated either in terms of youth or of separate mechanical parts. In terms of health care, autonomy and control of one's body, one's life is biologically as well as metaphysically the key to the fountain of age.

Our aim as a society should be to maximize human function and good human life. We do not need more expensive and costly nursing homes, exotic, high-tech machinery and over-diagnosis of disease, but more measures not necessarily medical that will enable people to continue to live independently, controlling their own lives in the community. We need to reject dehumanizing treatment that makes life no longer worth living

even if we are kept technically alive. I do not underestimate important technological advances in medical care; they should be available. But we should resist the futile pursuit of new, esoteric, and pharmaceutical cures for exotic diseases and terminal illnesses—or disabilities that can be lived with but can't be cured, or where the cure is more disabling than the condition.

What is needed is a new version of the old-fashioned family doctor trained to treat the whole person because the person is more whole in age than in any other time. The diagnosis of narrow symptoms and "cure" often results in the overuse and dangerous mixing of drugs in age. Reaction to such drugs is one of the main causes of hospital admissions of older people. The medical profession, from nurse practitioners to doctors or new kind of peer counsellors, should go beyond diagnosis of specific disease to maintaining and enhancing function—that must be the focus of care for older people. If treatment of disease results in the loss of function or independence, institutionalization is the costly, undesirable result.

**NPQ** | As President Bill Clinton's administration works to pass a health-care reform package, what do you believe should be the focus of health care reform?

**FRIEDAN** | While I don't have all the details of the Clinton Administration's health plan, any reform of our health care system should not tamper with Social Security or Medicare. There is no fountain of age without survival and Social Security is absolutely essential. There are a great many people in America to whom Social Security makes the difference between having choice and options with age and no choice at all. For people living entirely on Social Security, it is barely enough. Even for people that have managed to save or take odd jobs, Social Security makes the difference that they be able to live a vital life.

More urgently, I am worried about intergenerational warfare that would make older people the scapegoats of the healthcare crisis. The suggestion now being heard that primary health resources should not be used by "greedy geezers," that it is their duty to "step aside and die," is outrageous. When people hit 60 or 65, they may have 20 or more years of healthy, vital life open to them; it should be unthinkable that we should solve the healthcare crisis by using triage against older people. In a country as wealthy as ours, there should be healthcare for everybody who needs it.

Addendum on Aging:

**DON'T COUNT GRANDMA OUT**

by

***Eulah Croson Laucks***

Probably few people spend much time wondering about the yearnings and passions of the elderly, for the simple reason that most people assume that in the normal process of aging yearning and passion diminish along with physical strengths.

The truth is that people who are three score plus and still sound of mind retain the force and vigor of their innate feelings and are affected by what happens to them, and around them, as profoundly as if they were young and had never grown old. Sensibilities and vulnerabilities that were theirs in their prime are as intense and vital in old age as they ever were. The pity is that, for the most part, those sensitivities have been stifled by popular misconceptions that have been reinforced by being widely accepted and lived out by the elders themselves.

The ready conclusion, made especially by younger generations, that "Grandma doesn't need much more than a nice safe place to putter around in, and a looking-in on once in a while," misses the mark by a wide margin. And considering the demographic realities that face a nation of lengthening lifespans, such a consensus--or absence of thought about the need for discovering the truth of the matter--suggests that a lot more consideration should be given to finding out what really goes on in the heads and hearts of people who are in or approaching elderhood.

I would wager that a surprising percentage of young to mid-age people harbor some kind of ingrained conviction that by the time the aging reach the state of being tagged "senior citizen" or "elderly", the feelings that had stirred within them when they were young will have ebbed, along with their physical strengths, to the point that the emotional pulse and empathetic needs that had been integral to their "vital" years will have become so dim as to be all but absent. The corollary of that conviction, then, is the belief that any remnants surviving of former discernment and sensual vigor need be addressed only perfunctorily--albeit with compassion and caring. This is to compound a fallacy.

What Grandma may feel in the cave of her soul, and what she may or may not yearn for, might surprise those of her progeny, for example, who at the least sign of diffidence or indecision in her--say, in the matter of choosing an acceptable life style for her age--are quick to mark the line of no return for giving credence to her judgment, and to begin to take on doing her thinking for her. Such presumptuous (not to say often self-serving) expediting of the Grandma Problem gives her a very good idea of what others feel is her timely place in the scheme of things, and usually pushes her into accommodating herself to the slot that is made for her. Thus, she contributes to the charade of acting out the kind of life she may not really want in the depth of that being full of wonder, anticipation and responsiveness that she is still harboring. (Her diffidence and indecision, in the first place, may have been brought on by her acknowledgment to herself that she *does* have a few foibles, which--although commonly accepted as eccentricities in a 50-year-old--may in her be deemed intimations of the onset of senility.)

I believe that the selfhood of a person is durable, being changed very little over the years, even from childhood, and then only by whatever environmental impingements may have acted as fine-tunings of the substance that was already there. I think the full force of that selfhood, unique within each one of us, continues on into old age as long as comprehension persists, always pushing outward with yearning and responsiveness toward interaction with other human beings. It emanates from a deep, indelible need for release, expression and fulfillment and remains with us from birth until the loss of awareness.

I would argue also that what often seems like callous warehousing of the elderly to places where little more than conventional needs are humanely taken care of results primarily from the lack of understanding about what happens inside to people of normal mental capacities as they age.

Perhaps at the root of influences giving rise to attitudes that underestimate and belittle the endurance of vital inner stirrings in old people has been the almost total disintegration of the extended form of family life, in which Grandma, in times now long past, had matriarchal standing and took a vital part in the action and interchange among several generations of kin.

And now, the fully established segregation of the elderly--even though by their own choice--into retirement communities that specifically exclude younger people, has reduced the chances for those living in such artificial worlds to interact with the kinds of stimulations that might nurture life-seeking urges. Instead, such segregation provides them the proper soil to foster alienation and doubt about no longer being where the action is.

The old adage that what isn't used withers away is never



more applicable than to the life-giving impulses of feeling that tend to be dampered in the souls of the aged because the existence of such feeling is underestimated or under-regarded, not only by them, but by a youth-centered society that, in general, is inclined to think of old people as endearing but expendable baggage.

Grandma may well have trouble threading a needle without a mechanical aid, and she may no longer make out all of the sloppy diction shouted at her from the next room, but she is still carrying in the depth of her being all the wondrous, indestructible sensibilities and passions that she has had all along, even though she, herself, may have been reluctant to let them surface.

Some perceptive grandmas, of course, after having spent years trying to fit the mold of common perceptions--and being bolstered by the fact that people today are, in general, physically younger than chronological tables suggest--are beginning to trust their own incredible discoveries about the existence and vitality of the feelings they now have that are as keen and sensitive as they ever were.

Even though Grandma may be walking around in an aging body, with sobriety and dignity, the likelihood is that the small indigenous volcano that has been churning around in her soul all her life is still as active and indestructible as it was in her prime.

Let her and the world acknowledge this, and be glad.

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