

# **'Being Aged' in the Everyday: Uncovering the meaning through elders' stories**

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## Abstract

*It's like the sun and the tide.* The aim of this study was to understand the meaning of 'being aged' through the everyday experiences of those who are aged. Philosophically, this interpretive study was informed by hermeneutics and interpretive phenomenology. The writings of two twentieth-century philosophers, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger, guided the study's design and research methods. The phenomenon of interest is 'being aged;' a thing which is ordinarily taken-for-granted in the everyday. However, much is already spoken and empirically 'known' about the phenomenon by those who are not yet aged. Methodologically the study's design sought to 'put aside' those voices and listen in closely to what elders themselves had to say about being in their everyday lives. Individual research conversations were conducted with fifteen participants; four Maori elders aged 71 to 93 and eleven non-Maori elders aged 80 to 97 years. All were living in private residences on Auckland's North Shore and recruited by way of the general electoral roll. The conversations were focused on gathering the stories of particular everyday events as well as the person's reflections on aging. Anecdotes drawn from the conversations formed the research text. Hermeneutics informed the interpretive engagement with this text. As a non-Maori researcher, cultural integrity of the text and the interpretations was enhanced through partnership with a Maori advisor. Dwelling hermeneutically with the anecdotal text was a way of listening to the spoken and unspoken words. Four overarching notions were illuminated and form the study's findings. They are my interpretive descriptions of the ordinary ways of 'being in the everyday,' the experiences of 'being with others' in advanced age, the announcing of being aged in the uncomfortableness of 'experiencing the unaccustomed' and how 'aging just is' there in an everyday way. Reflecting phenomenologically on the findings, the meaning of being aged is in its ordinariness. My thesis is that being in the ordinary everyday in advanced age both conceals and reveals the phenomenon of being aged.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaumatua is a Maori word meaning male elder (Walker, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Mihi whakatau is a formal speech of welcome (Walker, 1990).

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# Before Setting Out

Before the textual journey begins, I offer a clarification of the language used and viewpoints taken within this project.

## Bringing Notions into Language

Language is a symbolic medium and thus plays an important part in communicating hidden meanings. Therefore, in accord with the study's philosophical underpinnings, I speak about participants rather than subjects, research conversations rather than interviews, text rather than data and hermeneutic engagement rather than analysis.

Heidegger (1927/1962) frequently uses the suffix 'ness' to signify the ontological character of things. For example, 'disclose' means "to lay open" while 'disclosedness' signifies "the character of having been laid open" (Heidegger, p. 105). I follow this same practice. Words used by Heidegger are written as they appear in his work, otherwise the suffix '-ness' is used, such as 'just is-ness,' when the word is not found within The Concise English Dictionary (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982).

For consistency, Macquarrie and Robinson's (Heidegger, 1927/1962) English translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, originally published in German in 1927, is used throughout the thesis. German words are excluded from direct quotes, except where their inclusion is essential to conveying understanding.

## The Words Chosen

I speak of 'elders' when referring to this study's participants and, where relevant, to older adults in general. Although the term is noted as being somewhat archaic (Simpson & Weiner, 1989b), I use it to signify a person "senior in years" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 363). Thus the word is used in deference to the participants and for its applicability when referring to older Maori (Walker, 1990).

For this study, Maori elders were aged 70 or over and non-Maori elders aged 80 or over. Furthermore, my use of the term ‘aged’ is descriptive of the person as being long-lived. Accordingly, the phrase ‘living in advanced age’ is used to signify living in the latter stage of life. And, when I speak of ‘aging’ I am generally referring to the ongoing maturation of those living in advanced age.

## **Understanding the Maori Words**

Maori terminology appears in this thesis. The first time a Maori word or expression is used its English meaning is offered either within the text or a footnote. A glossary of terms (Appendix I) is provided after the final chapter as an easy point of reference for the reader.

## **Who is Speaking?**

Four participants in this study identified as Maori, the indigenous people of this land. In view of this, I have worked to embrace the meanings inherent within te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi, our country’s founding constitutional document. Throughout the research journey I have been privileged to have a Maori advisor walk alongside me, ensuring I protected the Maori elders and their knowledge as treasures within Maoridom. Hence, when I offer interpretation of Maori content, the authoritative voice comes from within this partnership. Otherwise, in the hermeneutic tradition, the interpretations offered in this thesis are mine.

As is customary in phenomenology, the participants’ voices are heard through the inclusion of anecdotal text. When they speak, the text is italicised to distinguish their words from my own. Each voice is recognised through the use of the person’s chosen pseudonym. Where others’ voices are brought into play I have made every attempt to show this clearly using the referencing conventions given in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001). ‘Endnote 10’ is the referencing platform used. And from time to time I use the first person pronoun ‘we’ or the adjective ‘our’ when referring to people in general.

# Chapter One: The Journey Begins

*“A long life makes me feel nearer truth, yet it won’t go into words”*  
 (Scott-Maxwell, 1968/1991, p. 25).

‘Being aged’ within the context of the everyday is the focus of this study. Already the words ‘being aged’ will stir thoughts and understandings. We all know people who are aged; someone in the family, someone who has passed on, or perhaps someone familiar in the neighbourhood. And if I mentioned the words ‘being aged’ to someone who is aged, they will already have an understanding of what it is; after all, they live their everyday being aged. Yet it is within this milieu of taken-for-granted understandings that this study finds its purpose. It “is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. Or, more accurately, the problem is...our ‘common sense’ pre-understandings” (van Manen, 2001, p. 46). Such pre-understandings predispose us to already ‘know’ what being aged means. The research question, therefore, seeks to illuminate the taken-for-granted by asking “how do elders experience aging in their everyday lives?”

‘Being aged’ is the phenomenon of interest. Much is already spoken and empirically ‘known’ about the phenomenon by those who are not yet aged. This study ‘puts aside’ those voices and listens in closely to what elders themselves have to say. It listens for the meaning of being aged within the stories told by fifteen elders aged 71 to 97 years. It is a listening to stories of being in their ordinary everyday. And it offers an interpretation of the meaning, as I understand it, from dwelling with what is spoken and what is unspoken. Thus, the methodology chosen is interpretive phenomenology under the philosophical umbrella of hermeneutics. The respective philosophies of Martin Heidegger [1889—1976] and Hans-Georg Gadamer [1900—2002] guide my way.

## Moving Toward the Study

I come to this study with the assumption that my own background and my experiences shape how I see and understand things. I accept that I cannot easily put aside my existing presuppositions about the experience of being aged, nor seek to do so. Heidegger (1927/1962) takes account of this concern by setting out the interpreter's need to elucidate his or her own related experiences and presuppositions about the phenomenon of interest, before beginning the hermeneutic task. Hence, in this section, I set out my history and I strive to understand myself more fully as part of beginning the research journey (Gadamer, 2004).

My wondering about the experience of being aged emanates from within my own life and the intricacies of the paths I have walked. Thus far, being aged is not something I can know in myself. Therefore, the understandings I already hold are my interpretations of others' experiences. When I look back over my almost five and a half decades, my thinking originates primarily from being in my family and my practice as an occupational therapist.

I grew up a middle child, having an older sister to follow around and a younger brother to boss about. We were a 1950s nuclear family; mum, dad and the three children. I was born a third generation New Zealander, except for my maternal grandmother. She was born in Scotland. And maybe because grandparents are grandparents I always thought of mine as being extraordinarily old. We lived in the same city as my father's parents. My memories carry images of being with them as they did the things they most treasured. Grandpa Jerry had been a champion single and double sculls rower which became a life-long interest through his coaching. The riverbank was like a second home for him. Nana Ruby was known for her knitting and often won prizes at the Easter Show. But, perhaps because we saw them more often, I do not remember 'seeing' them age as I saw my maternal grandparents get older. They lived way down in the South Island. Grandpa Alec seemed to always be busy in the large vegetable garden and orchard out behind the house. Always things were planted in very straight rows. And always there was plenty of produce to give away. He died when I was only nine. Nana Janet turned black, red and white currents from the garden into exotic-

tasting jams and she baked the best bread and butter pudding. When she told us stories they never came from a story book. As children, every few years we would go and stay with them for the summer holidays. Then most years, particularly after Grandpa died, Nana Janet would come to stay with us for a month or so.

Nana's visits always meant going to the Scottish dances at the Caledonian Club. We were lucky; it was just a few blocks from home. I don't remember the year that stopped; but it did. One year Nana just didn't go. After that, we could usually find her out in the sun porch, knitting or reading. Each time she came she seemed to call on my 'younger eyes' for more help with things, like finding the stitch she had just dropped or threading a needle. And she stopped making pikelets on the griddle on the coal range. I don't remember us talking as a family about Nana's getting older; I seemed to just know she was. Towards the end, her visits stopped. I was 18 when Nana Janet died. She was my favourite but I never thought to wonder how being aged was for her. I only knew how her being aged was for me. If she visited now I would ask her about things which remained hidden to me back then.

None of my grandparents lived long enough to see where my education would take me in life. My father was a physician and my mother a nurse so it seemed I was always destined for going into a career in health. Growing up I was always making things and my mother thought I would be a good occupational therapist. That is what I did. My first job as an occupational therapist took me back to the hospital in my home town. After that, my practice career spanned two general and two psychiatric hospitals. Being in those environments subtly influenced my understandings of being aged. Looking back I see I was too ready to solve everyday problems for my elder clients. And I think I was too quick to use my technical knowledge and issue adaptive equipment or order home alterations. At the time I was mindful of being client-centred. Yet on reflection, I think my knowing about occupational therapy theory and practice modalities got in the way of my being open to considering what was not self-evident; at least not to me. The subtle complexities of being aged in an everyday context remained covered over. So I asked pragmatic questions, like whether there was a bath or shower at home and how many back steps there were to get out to the clothesline.

I got specific answers. Just like my practice with people of other ages, my working with elders was mostly about helping them overcome their everyday functional difficulties. Amidst all my therapy experiences, one event stands out as making me think about my thinking.

My travels had taken me to Edinburgh where I found work at a psychiatric day clinic for older people. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were the days when those with varying degrees of dementia attended. Being the occupational therapist, I assessed the ‘patient’s’ abilities to carry out everyday occupations. And I designed individual and group occupationally-focused programmes aimed at retaining as many everyday functions as possible. There I met Betty. She was in her late 80s, widowed, and living alone. At the day clinic Betty seemed to always be lost, wanting to find her way out. How could she be managing safely at home? My professional ‘knowing’ led me to do a home visit. I expected the visit to expose Betty’s risks of being harmed at home and reveal the level of care she now ‘needed.’ I can still picture the grey stone tenement block and the narrow stairway leading up to her unit. Now I was in Betty’s space; she was not in mine. Here Betty was at home. The agitated, confused Betty was the Betty lighting her gas stove, making me a cup of tea, showing me her corner store and the post office from her sitting room window. In the moment, my unspoken assumptions were brought to the fore. Betty showed me what I had been unable, or perhaps unwilling, to see; a richness and complexity of being aged. I carry Betty’s story with me. It is with me in the classrooms where I have spent much of the last 17 years guiding undergraduate students in their quest to become occupational therapists. I only hope they will experience their own ‘Betty’ on their journey of learning.

Then, about six years ago I saw my father ‘suddenly age.’ One evening the phone call came from one of his medical colleagues at a dinner meeting. My father had collapsed. His peers had the job of resuscitating him before the ambulance got there. And through my unprepared eyes, the man on the emergency room stretcher was barely recognisable as the father I knew. This man was aged. He was stripped of the things which made him his usual self. He was without his glasses and hearing aid. He was lying waiting; uncertain of what would happen

next. Now the questions kept coming for me. How was it for my father to go so suddenly from being competent in his collegial world to seeming so vulnerable? How was it for him to go so unexpectedly from the one who cared for others to being the one cared for? And how was it for him to be lying there amidst the hurry of the emergency room with his daughter watching on? Was it that he was thinking these things also, or was it my own awkwardness that raised these wonderings for me? As an occupational therapist I have walked past many other aged people in similar circumstances yet had never stopped to ponder things so deeply before. On reflection, I see how I silenced the things I never heard. But, not knowing how to open such conversations with my father, I let the event slip quietly into the background of our lives.

Several years later when preparing the application to the ethics committee for this research, my father died suddenly. His passing reminded me that living in advanced age means things can change abruptly. I thought of him, his life and the things he liked to do as I ventured into this study. The thinking helped me to elucidate my curiosity in what people do to occupy themselves and the meaning of what they do. I had the sense that it was my father's continued engagement in writing medical history that made his everyday worthwhile right up until his end. And he always said it was doing the daily crossword which kept his brain going. Accordingly, two presuppositions became visible to me at the outset of this study. I assumed, in advanced age, a worthwhile day means doing the things which make a person who they are. And I assumed each person would have their own understanding of what contributes to their healthfulness and keeps them going.

In essence, I believe my taken-for-granted assumptions about elders' experience and meaning of being aged have often closed down my being mindful. From my reflections I have a greater awareness of how being in my family and being an occupational therapist led me to interpret things in particular ways. Hence, being in the experience of uncovering my presuppositions is in itself profound. It causes me to gaze upon my own fallibility; to see how my falling into accepting some things as 'truths' means a glossing over and missing other things. It reveals to me how intuitively this happens and how my already-there

knowledge is a ‘not-knowing’ about being aged. Most importantly, it means a new uncertainty accompanied me along the way for this study.

## **What Drew me to this Study**

“One needs to try to continue doing those things you find interesting, satisfying, self-fulfilling. And for some it can be a garden, a very real one; it can be, I guess, knitting” (Hume Cronyn in Goldman, 1985/1991, p. 156).

It is difficult for me to pinpoint any one moment which turned my research interests towards the aged. The interest has just grown for me. But I remember clearly the particular events which began my journey towards this study. In 2003, I had a paper accepted for an international occupational science symposium to be held in May the following year. When I responded to the call for abstracts many months earlier, I had expected to present the preliminary findings from a proposed, multidisciplinary project on older people and resilience. This was not how things eventuated. So I found myself a few months out from the conference with a decision to be made. My solution beckoned me forth. The reworked abstract became ‘Storied understandings of aging and the human spirit.’ It would be about the meaning of elder’s enjoyable, everyday occupations; the things which are interesting, satisfying and self-fulfilling.

My parents and six of my mother’s friends agreed to assist my endeavour. Elizabeth, at 78, was the youngest. One at a time, they invited me to join them as they did whatever it was they liked to do in a day. Billie took me with her to the zoo on her day as a volunteer Zoo Host. She said the meaning for her was in knowing and sharing knowledge about the many reptiles, birds and other species, particularly the rhinoceros. And in the garage workshop I chatted with John as he worked on his hand-crafted croquet mallet. For him, the meaning was in handling and sculpting the recycled native timbers as well as solving construction problems. John said that’s what draws him into the workshop most days.

The eight vignettes and photographs I gathered became the centre-piece of a theoretical discussion about aging and the meaning of everyday occupations which enliven the human spirit. By all accounts, the conference presentation was a

success. But I was left with a lingering question; what had I missed? What did I not hear and what did I not see? Billie, John, Myrtle, Mona, Joy, Michael, Rex and Elizabeth each spoke of many things during my time with them, but being aged was covered over by other conversations. Was it that the meanings of their enjoyable occupations were so compelling that I neglected to consider something as commonplace as being aged? In each moment, I had simply accepted their being aged and looked elsewhere for meaning. It took many drafts of the research question for this study for me to articulate what it was that most piqued my curiosity. Nonetheless, a year after the occupational science symposium, this research journey had begun.

## **Why the Study Matters**

Why this study matters is found within the ordinariness of the phenomenon of being aged. In the opening paragraph, the taken-for-granted understandings of being aged are put forward as a purpose for the study. And it is in this self-evident mode of already knowing which makes this study matter. Firstly the ontological view this study brings, illuminates the primordial experienced nature of being aged. In doing so, it goes back to the voices of those who experience the phenomenon everyday. This makes it matter as it reveals what is otherwise covered over by normalised descriptions and theoretical explanations of aging and the aged. Hence, this interpretive phenomenological perspective brings a different view and offers a potential to unveil new horizons of understanding. It offers the possibility for opening up questions not yet asked. And although the research does not proceed from an applied base, listening ontologically to elders' voices may provide compelling learning for practitioners in the health and social domains.

Already, I have experienced the potency of bringing elders' stories into the classroom. In 2007 I had the opportunity to share my research with fourth-year medical students enrolled in an optional sociology paper. Its purpose was to broaden their views of health and medicine through a sociological lens. I began by asking the students to think of someone who is aged and, next, to consider why they thought of that person as being aged. Physical appearance and medical events

dominated their taken-for-granted understandings of the aged person. Then, through me, some of the participants from this study ‘spoke.’ Where possible I had selected stories of encounters with health practitioners. In those moments, the students’ own voices, and perhaps those they usually heard in their everyday learning, were hushed. Emotions were stirred, thoughts provoked and new associations with practice were voiced. One student said the stories made her think of her grandmother. Maybe when she goes into practice she will approach elders with the care and sensitivity she feels for her grandmother. Hence, I saw how listening to elders’ spoken accounts of ordinary experiences were a potent medium for deepening the thinking about practice.

Furthermore, this study matters as being aged is something that most of us will come to experience. It offers different understandings which may guide how we move towards being aged. Or it may help make sense of being in the everyday when we are aged. Within the context of an aging population, both nationally and globally, being aged is an important phenomenon to apprehend. Heidegger (1927/1962) points to “the very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question” (p. 23). Grant (2001), a local gerontologist, speaks to the same matter by suggesting “the story is far from complete” (p. 781). In doing so, he adds his voice to a growing call for a greater emphasis on understanding aging as it is experienced. Phenomenological research has been described as a “method that explores the humanness of a being in the world” (Bergum, 1991, p. 55). Hence, lastly, this study matters by way of its contribution of ‘humanness’ to gerontological scholarship. Understanding ‘being aged’ complements understandings of aging and the aged.

## **Being Aged in Context**

Older people have lived their lives, they’ve made their contribution to the community, they’ve been the nation and they should be treated, however old, in the best possible way. After all, what the young inherit has been brought about by the old people. (Norah Taylor in Maclean, 2000, p. 74)

Ontologically things always exist within a context. Accordingly the phenomenon of being aged has its own ‘there.’ It is embedded within a milieu of historical, demographic and sociocultural circumstances. And although New Zealand cannot be disentangled from its broader, global setting, it is my principal focus for articulating this study’s context.

### **Being Aged in the Population**

“Young people are a resource and too many oldies in the population are a drag” (McCrone, 2007, p. A14).

These recently spoken words seem to capture the prevailing dialogue on the aging population. Yet they may equally have been spoken a quarter of a century ago. Whichever direction I turn in, the talk has been, and is, about the pending burden of this country’s demographic transition to an older age structure (Barker, Caughey, & Guthrie, 1982; Boddington, 2003; Poole, 2003). There is no question; we are amid a population revolution. When the eldest participants in this study were born, around 1908, the projected lifespan was 61 years for men and 68 for women. By the time they entered their 8<sup>th</sup> decade, only a quarter of their cohort were still living. This means the study’s participants are the long-lived. And now, a century later, men’s and women’s life expectancy has extended to 76 and 82 years respectively (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). The evolving longevity suggests that the meaning of being aged may be temporally-bound within the life span rather than being bound to a particular calendar age. Carl Jung (as cited in Fowler & McCutcheon, 1991) suggests “a human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if his longevity had no meaning for the species to which he belongs” (p. 3). Yet the greater question of the meaning of being remains beyond the scope of this study.

However, advancing life expectancy is only one contributor to the aging of our population (Davey, de Joux, Nana, & Arcus, 2004; Statistics New Zealand, 2002). New Zealand’s demographic transition to an older age structure is more due to a pattern of low mortality and low fertility over the last fifty years (Boddington, 2003). Indicatively, this study’s participants were likely to have fewer grandchildren than the generation before them did. For these participants,

being in the context of a ‘structurally’ aging population means they are part of the group, aged 65 and older, which is increasingly and ‘disproportionately’ represented in the country’s demographic profile (Poole, 2003). In contrast however, the Maori elders in this study are part of a sub-group which is still showing a ‘numerical aging’ (Poole). That is, although their cohort of elder Maori are increasing in number, their proportional representation within the Maori population has remained at just 4 percent since the beginning of this century (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). This contextual discrepancy underlines the importance of my recognising the study’s Maori participants as taonga, or treasures (Walker, 1990). There are proportionately so few of them.

And to bring the aging population picture into perspective, at present, fewer than one in eight New Zealanders are aged 65 years and older (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). By 2040, they will number one in four. Or, I should say ‘we’ will number one in four as I will be 87. And perhaps most significantly, those aged 85 years and older constitute the fastest growing group with a projected six-fold increase over the first half of this century (Davey et al., 2004). Contextually, it raises the question of whether the meaning of being aged is also in transition. Our experiences of ‘being aged’ may evolve as being ‘aged’ becomes more commonplace in our communities. However this study is about what is and not what might be.

### **Being Aged in Social Policy**

“It is important that government policies across the range of issues—including employment, health, housing and income support—allow and encourage older people, and future generations of older people, to experience ageing as a positive and productive phenomenon”(Minister for Senior Citizens, 2001, p. 11).

Policy is developed in response to existent or emergent social concerns. The above extract from the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy (Minister for Senior Citizens, 2001) suggests a ‘positive’ policy is that which addresses the ‘inevitable;’ the ‘issue’ of being aged. Or more particularly, it is about circumventing the issues which pose an anticipated drain on health and social

services. Hence, in the face of the country's demographic transition, we are in a context of policy development aimed at remediating the issues of being in an aged society. But while we are amid a current flurry of policy activity, New Zealand has a long history of attempting to address the 'social concerns' of its elder citizens. As a young nation, the pattern of colonisation created a rather unique environment for the aged.

The early social context for Maori was predominantly "tribal and community oriented" (Parker, 1982, p. 11), but the picture was vastly different for the new Pakeha<sup>3</sup> settlers. Many of the early immigrants from Great Britain and the early waves of refugees from Europe left both their homelands and families behind (Barker et al., 1982). Single men arrived in large numbers, many of whom never married or had children. So, by the end of the nineteenth century, the country was home to significant numbers of single older men without family support (Department of Social Welfare, 1982). In response, the Old Age Pension Act was enacted in 1898. It was a way of providing some security for the 'old' and socially impoverished. Men from the age of 65, or 60 for women, were eligible provided they met the entitlement criteria and were deemed to be of good moral character. A century on, the gendered context is turned about. Older women greatly outnumber older men and are more likely to be living alone in their advanced years. The participants in this study who aged 85 and older are part of a cohort in which there are more than 160 women for every 100 men (Statistics New Zealand, 2006).

New Zealand's overarching philosophical belief is that "all elderly people should have an income which will enable them to live in dignity and comfort" (Department of Social Welfare, 1982, p. 37). The participants in this study are part of the generation for whom the 'old age pension' is universally available for all persons aged 65 and older. It has been this way since the passing of the Social Security Act of 1938. Yet in our contemporary context the philosophy seems to be shifting to one of 'how much aging we can afford' (St John, 2007). When the

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<sup>3</sup> Pakeha is the Maori word meaning people with fair skin, of European descent (Walker, 1990).

current National Superannuation scheme was introduced in 1977, only 14 percent of New Zealand's population was aged 60 or older (Barker et al., 1982). Hence, politically the meaning of the population 'being aged' is one of being an economic burden.

We can see from around the time of the early 1980s a heightened attention, both nationally and globally, toward planning for a future in which a significant proportion of people will be classified as 'old.' Looking at some of the earliest epidemiological reports, the thinking focused on planning for how the elderly would be 'cared' for (World Health Organisation, 1982). From this view, being aged means being sick and becoming dependent. New Zealand's report to the 1982 United Nations World Assembly on Ageing provides a local contextual snapshot of the thinking. In their introduction, the authors talk of the aged as being a stereotyped, homogeneous 'minority group.' They go on to suggest that "if the elderly are accepted as normal members of society they will be better off than if they are regarded as a special group for whom some unusual provision should be made" (Barker et al., 1982, p. 2). Hence, New Zealand tells the World Assembly on Ageing, the greatest handicap for those who are aged is the negative public attitude (Barker et al.). The words suggest the experience of being aged is intertwined with how others think about aging and the aged. It seems the ground was fertile for growing this idea. At about the same time, New Zealand's Social Advisory Council (1984) reported it had "come to see [its] major task as that of fostering a more positive understanding of old age and older people" (p. 12). Accordingly, this harking back to others' negatives attitudes points to it being seen as an endemic feature of the social context.

Standing back, it is interesting to look at the language itself and consider its change over time. A hundred years ago, being 60 or older was enshrined in social policy as being 'old.' Then, by the late 1970s policy speaks of 'the elderly' rather than the old. Now, the contemporary generation of policy documents speak a different language. The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy (Minister for Senior Citizens, 2001) talks of 'older New Zealanders.' And it speaks of them as being a valuable resource with the "skills, knowledge and experience to contribute to society" (Minister for Senior Citizens, p. 6). But while this sounds like a turn

around in thinking, its purpose is identified as promoting older peoples' "value and participation" (Minister for Senior Citizens, p. 6). Looking behind the words, the contemporary attitudinal context still poses a barrier to elders' inclusion. The policy alludes to an enduring public attitude of "older age as a time of retirement and withdrawal" (Minister for Senior Citizens, p. 9). Hence, policy-driven intervention is considered necessary for opening up elders' possibilities for being in their everyday. Accordingly, the Positive Ageing Strategy aims to not only create positive experiences for those who are aged but to positively influence the "younger generations' attitudes, expectations, and actions regarding ageing and older people" (Minister for Senior Citizens, p. 9). What this picture suggests is an enduring lack of public understanding about what it means to be aged or to live everyday as an older New Zealander.

### **Being Aged in the Research Community**

"Years are being added to life and a major policy and research challenge is to add quality to those years. Researchers should ensure that the conceptualisation takes account of the views of older individuals"

(Division for Social Policy and Development, 2002).

Looking internationally, the same concerns seem to matter. In 2002, two decades after the first summit, the United Nations hosted its Second World Assembly on Ageing. As an outcome the United Nations 'Programme on Ageing' was established. And, as a member state New Zealand announced its intention to abide by the Programme's three priority areas. These are the "development for an ageing world, advancing health and well-being into old age, and ensuring an enabling and supportive environment" (United Nations Organisation, 2002). Accordingly, the social context is once again illuminated as an important dimension of elder's experience of being aged.

But the international voice goes a step further. It calls for growing knowledge and understanding by way of focusing international research activities on aging and the aged. Hence, the 'Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-First Century' is widely promulgated as "a joint project of the United Nations Office on Ageing and the International Association of Gerontology" (Division for

Social Policy and Development, 2002). It provides a mandate for governments and researchers to refocus the priorities in gerontology. By far the greatest emphasis is on setting a direction for ‘scientific’ research. Nevertheless, nested amongst the long list of priority topics is research goal number 2.7.6; the “‘Meaning of life’ for older people” (Division for Social Policy and Development). As I interpret it, it is a call to hear elders’ experiences of being in the world. Research goal 2.7.6 points to the importance of exploring the ‘meaning of being aged.’

## **Seeing the Place for this Study**

In drawing on the contextual background for this study I describe how it finds its place; its justification for being. Firstly, I go back to Florida Scott-Maxwell’s (1968/1991) opening words for this chapter. They are drawn from the journal she began in her 83<sup>rd</sup> year. Being aged for her was a feeling ‘nearer to truth;’ yet it was a feeling that “won’t go into words” (Scott-Maxwell, p. 25). This interpretive phenomenological study aims to bring into language the experience of being aged that ‘won’t go into words.’ The view from within New Zealand reveals several decades of documents pointing to a lack of understanding of the experience of aging and of the aged. With being aged becoming so much more commonplace, understanding elders’ lived experiences is an important social endeavour. Stepping out to the contemporary international context, the Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-First Century tells us of the direction gerontological research should take. Studies which take account of older individuals’ views and their meaning of being in the world are called for. And lastly, an ontological exploration of the ‘being’ of being aged has the potential to throw a new light on that which is already ‘known.’ Thus this study finds its place.

## **Unveiling the Meaning of Being Aged**

Above all, this study is an exploration of meaning; the meaning of being aged. It proceeds from my assumption that being aged is a phenomenon which can be experienced. But in saying this, it is a phenomenon which is usually veiled in the darkness of the taken-for-granted. In its complexity it is something ordinarily beyond the everyday realm of apprehension. Hence, the meaning of being aged

dwells in the shadows. It follows, then, that it is not something a person could readily ‘put into words.’ So rather than attempt to directly probe questions of meaning, I moved from the supposition that elder’s everyday experiences would harbour the meaning of being aged. This everyday milieu is where I chose to look for uncovering questions of meaning. As a philosopher Heidegger deeply concerned himself with “the ordinary, everyday manner of existence” (King, 2001, p. 21). Thus, Heidegger’s (1927/1962) interpretive phenomenology was chosen for its relevance in guiding my research journey.

Consistent with this approach, a way of moving towards unveiling meaning is through an interpretation of texts. Within this study, the written transcriptions of my conversations with elders are the principal text from which my understandings arise. Existing texts such as popular literature, poetry, newspaper articles, social policy documents and scholarly publications are turned to as a way of deepening my interpretations. Thus hermeneutics, informed by the work of Gadamer (2004), offers an overarching philosophical framework.

Along the way, this exploratory journey aims to glimpse the meaning of being aged rather than expose it in its completeness. I do not expect to lay it bare for all to see clearly. Neither do I expect to find being aged as being the same for all participants. In the words of Florida Scott-Maxwell (1968/1991), “age must be different for each. We may each die from being ourselves. That small part that cannot be shared or shown” (p. 25). Hence I presuppose elder’s everyday experiences of living in advanced age to be different, particular to the person and their context. Yet in those differences may be sameness. Unveiling a possible meaning of being aged is a listening for what is common. To begin the journey, we already have some understanding of the meaning of being aged.

### **The Meanings in Language**

“Sadly the years have taken their toll.” These are the words spoken by Geoffrey Martin (2007, p. 7) in the introduction to his book on the 1957-58 race

to the South Pole. He is talking about Sir Edmund Hillary<sup>4</sup> [1919-2008] fifty years after the great adventure. Martin says no more on the topic; he assumes the words speak for themselves. It illustrates how, in everyday conversations, we speak of ‘age’ and of being ‘aged’ without pausing to define what we mean. The meanings are taken-for-granted. This is not surprising; they have a long lineage dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Our modern English word ‘age’ originates from ‘aage’ or ‘eage’ in old French meaning “a period of existence” or “a period of time” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989a, p. 245). This tells me that existence is a state of being. A thing must exist in order to age. Thus ‘being aged’ is inherently ontological and temporal in nature. The definitions reminds me of how ubiquitous aging is. All things, animal, vegetable and mineral, exist in their unique forms for a length of time. Each and every thing has the potential to exist in an aged state.

Multiple meanings of human aging are embedded in the English language (Simpson & Weiner, 1989a). We can say someone is ‘of an age’ meaning they have lived for a specified time, as when we say *he is 97*. Or we might mean they are ‘of an age’ when something is expected to happen or to show. For example, we might say *she is of an age when slowing down is expected*. In New Zealand, *being aged 65* means being of an age of eligibility for the national pension. However, if we say someone *does not look their age*, it means they do not look to be the age they are. These words point to us already ‘knowing’ what being a particular age should look like. Yet age seems to show quite differently for people of the same age. So where do our expectations come from? Is it our own histories which tell us or the messages told to us in public images? They may come from both of these and more.

When we speak of people being ‘aged,’ we can be referring to a particular period of life, such as when we say *he is aged*. In this sense, we mean the person is in ‘the latter part of life.’ But the meanings go further. By saying someone ‘is aged’ we can also mean they are in their ‘old age.’ And being ‘old’ is “when the physical effects of protracted existence become apparent” (Simpson & Weiner,

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<sup>4</sup> “New Zealand mountaineer and explorer...attained, with Sherpa Tensing, the summit of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953” (Thorne & Collocott, 1974, pp. 642-643).

1989a, p. 245). Hence, in everyday conversation we might then say *she is showing her age* or *his age is catching up with him*. In this way we mean the signs of aging or old age, as we think of them, are evident.

When used as a verb, ‘age’ means ‘to grow old,’ ‘to become aged’ or ‘to cause to grow old.’ Colloquially, we might say a person *has aged* meaning we see them as having grown older quite suddenly. Something has ‘aged’ them. In this way we mean that being aged is more evident to us in some way. Or somehow the time has seemed to go more quickly for that person. Alternatively, when we speak of someone as ‘aged’ we can simply mean they have ‘lived or existed a long time;’ they are ‘of advanced age.’ According to the dictionary being aged means the same as being ‘old.’ Thus, saying someone is old is formally a descriptive way of saying they are long-lived. However, in everyday conversation, the taken-for-granted meaning of being ‘old’ as being worn or decrepit seems to lie unspoken behind the word itself (Simpson & Weiner, 1989c). Hence, substituting ‘old’ for ‘aged’ can convey disparagement.

Yet, at a broader level, ‘aged’ also means the “duration of life as ordinarily brings body and mind to full development” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989a, p. 245). In this sense, the meaning of being aged is being complete. It speaks of a potential for wholeness which can only be achieved through being long-lived.

So as we go about our everyday lives we hear, and we speak to, the many meanings of ‘age’ and ‘aged.’ It is their seeming clarity and unspoken agreement which helps to keep the ontological meaning of ‘being aged’ veiled in darkness.

### **The Meanings in Science**

Meanings of being aged are also deeply embedded within the scientific domain. Within chronology, “the science of computing time” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 199), being aged means living beyond a particular calendar age. New Zealand is just one of many societies which measures the calendar age of its citizens. It is a way of knowing when ‘old age’ begins for each person (Covey, 1992; Victor, 1987). Thus chronological age seems to provide a universally and compellingly objective measure. But in terms of social and biological markers, its meanings are merely approximate and inconsistent (Victor). Beyond chronology,

human development sciences offer further meanings. In lifecycle terms, being aged exists as a natural phenomenon along a continuum in a ‘seemingly’ “orderly progression from infancy to old age” (Victor, p. 14). Yet rather than one universal pattern of life roles and life tasks characterising ‘old age,’ individuals show a multitude of different sub-lifecycles. Being aged, therefore, means being in a context of lifelong and episodic circumstances rather than being one way of existing in the everyday.

Perhaps most pervasive are the biological meanings of being aged. These are entrenched within the sciences which seek to explain what causes us to age and to die. And they appear in the search to elucidate the aging body and mind (Markson, 2003). Biologically, being aged means senescence; being in the process of aging. Originating from the Latin word ‘senex’ meaning old or an old man, senescence is translated from ‘senescere’ in Latin, meaning “to grow old” (Harper, 2001). Thus a contemporary meaning of being biologically aged is the “losses in normal function that occur after sexual maturation and continue up to the time of maximum longevity” (Markson, p. 126). In other words, biological aging is a showing of gradual decline in functional efficiencies of molecules, cells, body parts and the body as a whole. Yet no universal explanations have been found as “no two people—even identical twins—necessarily age at the same rate” (Markson, p. 131). Also, aging always occurs within an environment. And it happens within a social context. So the ‘usual’ aging which shows is not necessarily the same thing as ‘normal’ aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Teasing out the difference is a biological conundrum. Thus the biological meanings of being aged are enigmatic. They continue to deepen in complexity as science becomes more sophisticated.

Speaking in his 80’s Henry Miller (Diehl, 1974/1991) philosophises: “Everything understandable becomes more and more mysterious. I think the genuine man of science would say the same thing. The more one penetrates the realm of knowledge the more puzzling everything becomes....That’s why knowledge is so relatively unimportant” (p. 52). Nonetheless, the scientific quest to know what can be known about aging continues. It renders bountiful understandings through an accrual of ontic knowledge. This is an empirical

knowledge; describing or explaining what is ‘real’ or concrete. Ontic knowledge “characterizes beings, not their being” (King, 2001, p. 46). Its importance and contribution to biomedical progress are not in question. However the sheer volume and continual flow of emerging factual knowledge may act to submerge the salience of the ‘meaning’ of being aged. Heidegger (1927/1962) implies “that which is ontically closest and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked” (p. 69). Drawing on this assumption, this study focuses in on the ontological; the usually overlooked. Through the experiences of those who are aged, this study endeavours to unveil something of the meaning of ‘being aged.’

## **A Map of the Textual Journey**

One story is told throughout the pages in this thesis. The story is the whole. Each chapter tells one part of the story, yet none can stand apart from the others. Together they make up the whole. However, reading this thesis can only be a textual journey through the parts. Stepping into the detail is the only way to get to the point of stepping back to see the whole. To guide the way, each chapter closes with a moment of reflective illumination. Each is a standing back and seeing again what has just been before moving on. A poem capturing the philosophical presence rounds off each chapter. Next, a map of the whole textual journey is offered.

A review of the literature follows in Chapter Two. In congruence with the approach taken in this study, it shows the conversations about being aged which already exist across a range of literature. The material presented, and my interpretation of meanings within it, provides a backdrop for this project.

The study’s philosophical underpinnings are offered in Chapter Three. Here, interpretive phenomenology and hermeneutics, as informed by Heidegger and Gadamer, are discussed. In order to show their relevance to this study, the philosophies are briefly described and an explanation of how they work together is offered.

Chapter Four presents the research methods. It reveals how I was guided by the philosophical underpinnings in conducting the study. Accordingly it

describes how I went about setting up the project and recruiting the participants as well as gathering and interpreting the text. My reflections on the study's trustworthiness bring the chapter to a close.

In between moving from the research methods toward the findings, the study's participants are introduced. Chapter Five is a profile of the elders who shared their stories. Here, I use photographic images and a brief history of each person as a way of contextualising the text and the interpretations which follow.

The research findings form Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine. Each of the four chapters lays out one central tenet of my interpretation of the anecdotal text. Extracts from the participants' stories are offered as a way of illustrating my interpretive journey through the research text.

Lastly, Chapter Ten brings the parts of the story together. It is a stepping back to consider the meanings garnered from the findings in order to bring the central thesis into view. From this vantage point, I also look outward to consider the implications of this study. I aim to leave you, the reader, seeing the whole story and hearing what matters.

## Chapter Two: Listening for Meanings in Language

Except for a few notable examples, such as *Ecclesiastes*, Cicero’s *De Senectute*, several of Montaigne’s *Essays*, some of Rousseau’s contemplations and a few others, there was little literary and philosophic output in Western civilization concerned with the rich and varied landscape of old age. (Butler, 1991, p. xi)

A rich and varied literary landscape is surveyed in this chapter. Consistent with this study’s philosophical traditions, the literature review is founded on the premise that “language is the presupposition for ‘saying’ and ‘showing’ something *as something*” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 175). Thus, in being guided by Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology I accept “there is no ‘is’ to things without a taking-as” (Sheehan, 2001, p. 10). That is, the words, phrases and whole texts within the literature are taken as expressing the always already there understandings of being aged. The language “presents a front, a surface, offers an appearance to be looked at” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 17). And language alludes to the unspoken ‘truths’ about the phenomenon of interest. Thus I aim to show the meanings of being aged which appear within and across the textual landscape.

Texts and the writers of texts are part of their own history. In the same way, those who look for understanding in texts bring their histories to the interpretive process (Lundin, Walhout, & Thiselton, 1999). Hence, as I turn toward the literature, my own horizon of understanding means that some language will speak more loudly to me than others. Some things will be seen more clearly and some meanings will be unearthed while others will remain covered over.

In my surveying the literary landscape I do not aim to discover and map out all that is known. I do not say ‘here is’ the field of research. Rather, guided by van Manen’s (2001) approach, I set out to show the conversations which already exist and to open up the meanings which are present. It is a way of listening for

the metaphors in the text; a listening for the words and phrases that have been transferred from one thing to another as a way of communicating unspoken meanings. “By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor toward the original” (van Manen, p. 49). Appropriately, this interpretive search for some of the ‘original’ understandings in the literature was undertaken following my phenomenological reflection on this study’s findings.

As much is already researched and written in relation to human aging, I approached the literature with the expectation that language is likely to be used in taken-for-granted ways. The words are likely to be spoken with no, or minimal, uncovering of the underlying assumptions and meanings. If this is so, the literature will abound with language which appears self-evident in nature. Thus, in the reading, I aimed to look beyond the textual surface. I considered what meanings showed, what was hidden or unsaid, as well as for whom the text was speaking (Carroll, 2007). As with a pictorial collage, the literature review is arranged as a cluster of images. It is a showing of how the phenomenon of interest is spoken about across and within a range of literature. The search for the already-there meanings took me to popular literature, including poetry and New Zealand fiction, print media as well as material published in books and scholarly journals.

## **Surveying the Horizon**

Within the general literary landscape three domains provided rich illustrations of the experiences of aging or of being aged. Firstly, throughout the duration of the study I collected journalistic writings from one daily newspaper, The New Zealand Herald. I saved the voices which said something about the phenomenon of interest. I also paid attention to writings from across the literary sector and collected together relevant poems and extracts from other publications. Thirdly, a search within the New Zealand literary genre uncovered a number of examples which bring forward elders’ experiences of being aged.

‘You are my darling Zita’ (Busch, 1991) is a personal account of six New Zealanders born around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “A voice allowed to speak without interruption—a voice saying something in the most direct manner—communicates a far greater intimacy” (Busch, p. xvii). Hence, the

'author' took on the role of arranging and presenting the words in a way that remained true to their essence. In the same vein, 'At the end of the day' (Maclean, 2000) is an edited collection of ten New Zealanders' reflections on life in their eighties. Thirdly, Kevin Ireland (2005), poet, novelist and memoirist, speaks directly of his experiences in his book 'On getting old.' Other notable New Zealand writers are turned to for their literary depictions of those who are aged. Here the short story collections of Janet Frame (1983; Frame, 1990a) and Katherine Mansfield (1978b) are turned to. Powell's (1963) novel 'Turi' enriches the landscape further. It opens up indigenous ways of thinking about aging. Each source will be drawn on as I unveil the metaphors of being aged.

Then, before surveying the scholarly literature, I considered the key words which would likely unearth relevant texts. Two clusters of words evolved and formed the basic search: *being aged* or *aging* or *ageing* or *being old* or *older adult* or *older person* or *elder*<sup>5</sup> and *everyday* or *lived experience* or *phenomenolog\** or *meaning* or *hermeneutic\**. Following this general exploration, other contextual notions such as *New Zealand* or *occupational therapy* or *Maori* or *gerontology* were layered into the search. Three online databases were primarily utilised: Academic Search Premiere, OVID and Multisearch. Firstly, Academic Search Premiere was selected for its extensive and retrospective coverage of multidisciplinary, scholarly publications within the fields of the social sciences, humanities, arts and literature, medical sciences, ethnic studies and more. Exploration within this domain was particularly fruitful. Following this, the OVID platform was chosen for its inclusion of other potentially relevant databases such as AMED, CINAHL, ERIC, Lippincott 100 Nursing and Health Sciences, MedLine and PsychInfo. Finally Multisearch was utilised for its broad coverage of fields including health, Maori and Pasifika, nursing, midwifery, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and social sciences. Each search unearthed new literature but as the layers of searching were conducted, a degree of convergence occurred

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<sup>5</sup> The asterisks indicate where truncation was used to ensure the search included variations of the basic words.

across the three databases. The searching continued until no further seemingly relevant publications were appearing.

When key articles were uncovered, the Scopus platform was utilised to explore the references cited and to see who had subsequently cited the article itself. This became a valuable source of identifying the voices which kept echoing across the literary divide. Finally, selected references were exported into Endnote and either electronic or hard copies of the articles were attained. In line with the study itself, research with elders living in the community remained as a focus. Then the reading already begun, began again.

## **Listening for the Metaphors**

The reading was a process of listening and thinking. It was a working to hear the presuppositions and meanings already present in the texts. And it was a gathering together of salient allegories of aging or being aged. Then, prior to beginning the writing, I attended a New Zealand Association of Gerontology conference. In the speaking to, and with each other, similar notions showed through. It is these metaphors which form the structure for the remainder of this chapter. As this research project aims to understand how elders experience aging in their everyday lives, I begin with interpreting the meanings which lie closest to the heart of the study. Where possible, I open each section by bringing forward the voice of the person; the voice which speaks from first hand experience. In listening across the textual landscape, it is this voice which is otherwise relatively silent.

## **Being Aged as Lived Experience**

“Isn’t it funny, I’ve never really thought much about being old. I don’t think I have ever been old. Perhaps I’m going to live until I start to feel I am old” (Maclean, 2000, p. 13). This is how Davina Whitehouse begins her account of everyday life. Born in 1912, she went on to become an accomplished New Zealand actress. Davina continues:

I don’t really concentrate much on growing old, I just concentrate on living and being and doing. I have a little guilt in that I have not got

enough energy and Dianaism to sink myself into good works, but I can't think of any good works I'd be good at (p. 17). I did do one thing before the Mercury [theatre] closed, but you see, I don't get asked. The last thing I was asked to do was in—and I loved it—a television thing, a sort of space fiction fairy story madness. I played a diseased old crone, very happily. (Maclean, p. 15)

Davina's words show the limitations of talking about 'old' for someone who is 88. To her, chronological age does not express what old is. So the word itself does not stand for what she thinks it means. Old is something that is hard to put into words. Paradoxically, as an actress in her 80s Davina's only work is playing an ailing 'old' woman. She acts being old without knowing what it is to feel old. In Davina's experience, the meaning of being old is elusive and much more than being her age.

Next, Muriel Morrison's (Busch, 1991) account gives further expression to the temporal, textured complexity of the lived experience of being aged:

For me being older has a richness about it. There is the richness of having known people for a long time. There's the richness of looking back, of seeing where certain things have come from. There is the richness of meeting new people all the time which is wonderful. And there's the richness now of taking things more quietly, of enjoying things in a better way than I used to....Yes, I think so, I have lived long enough to see the richness in old age. Now I see every little thing that has happened as part of the total thing—call it a fabric, if you like—into which all is woven. Nothing really has been a waste. And sometimes it's been the insignificant, the little events which have shown the way to larger things. You know, there was never actually a time when I felt, today I have become old. One day has followed the next, and I seem to be just the same as I was yesterday. And yet the time has gone by. (pp. 260-261)

Muriel describes being aged as being in a continuous experience of her life. Reaching her 80s is not so much a point in time but an apprehension of having a particular horizon of understanding. Being aged is an amalgamation of

what is and of all that has gone before. From this view, being aged means a way of thinking about and of engaging in the world.

Having such first hand accounts available through literary publications is an opportunity for the person to add their voice to the realm of what is written about aging. Elders' speaking out about how it is for them creates an avenue for those who listen to move beyond the dominant voices which are present. Direct accounts are few. Predominantly, where the person's voice is heard within the scholarly literature it is filtered through the research process. Around the early 1990s there is an audible call coming from within the field of gerontology to study how people who are 'old' experience aging (Cremin, 1992; Thompson, 1993). Cremin appealed to gerontologists to look closely at their pre-understandings and language. He suggests the many negative societal beliefs about 'old people' are also evident in the gerontological literature. Lending support to Cremin's claim, a handful of qualitative studies from the mid 1980s were beginning to show that research participants, who were otherwise accepted as being 'old,' did not identify with their chronological age (Kaufman, 2000).

Cremin's (1992) own ethnographic study opened up discrepancies in the meaning of experiencing being old. He conducted participant observation and interviews with five older people, their adult children and their health practitioners at a geriatric assessment clinic. Fundamentally, at odds with the others' interpretations, the elders themselves distinguished between "*feeling* old and *being* old" (Cremin, p. 1307). Feeling old was not a thing that appeared and stayed. Feeling old was a to-ing and fro-ing amid everyday kinds of troublesome events. What Cremin's study points to is the contradictory presuppositions held by each group of participants. It shows the others already 'knew' the person 'was old.' Their already-there understandings influenced how the adult children and the health practitioners engaged with the person and their situation. To them, the person's age and the occurrence of events or problems often associated with aging meant their parent, or patient, was old. And it seems we might simply expect people who are long-lived to feel old (Nilsson, Sarvimaki, & Ekman, 2000). Accordingly, from the outside, being aged means the same thing as being old.

A call for greater awareness of the unspoken understandings in gerontological research was proffered by Thompson (1993):

It is an unfortunate paradox that the energy which social science researchers have put into the documenting of the social problems and deprivations of older people in the present has in itself reinforced conventional misunderstanding and demeaning attitudes towards the old. The result has been a neglect of the ordinary experience of ageing in favour of the pathological. (p. 685)

Researching the ‘ordinary’ aging experience, Thompson (1993) employed a narrative methodology. Life history stories were gathered from 55 people aged between 60 and 87 years. He interpreted the participants’ stories as showing they did not ‘feel old’ in their ‘real selves’ except when experiencing physical illness or depression. This notion is in accordance with Cremin’s (1992) findings of feeling old as being sporadic in nature. Yet in spite of Thompson’s core finding that the participants did not feel old, he continues to bring the talk of “old people” and “old age” (p. 690) into his language. This phenomenon reveals a challenge which besets all gerontologists. Paradoxically, ordinary scholarly language may be oppositional to the meanings uncovered by the research. Being steeped within a discipline-based language means it is easy to unknowingly fall back into using familiar words. The unspoken challenge for researchers is to find words which carry elders’ experiential meanings into scholarly talk.

Yet this is not to say that the lived experience of being aged might not be a ‘being old.’ What seems important is the person’s self-determining when something they think of as being old is experienced. When listening to Alex Coutts’ (Busch, 1991) words, we almost hear the ‘not old’ door slam behind him:

I was young and then I was old. It was like passing through a screen, a ray or something. Old age is a thing that didn’t creep up on me, it hit me – bang. Before that happened I was always going like hell. Speed was everything to me. If I did anything, I did it fast. Think fast, talk fast, run fast, play fast, everything was fast until this. And that’s what hurts me most of anything, to be so slow. My old age come on just like shuttin’ a

door. I'd gone through a door, and that's when I come out an old man. (p. 93)

The words carry the intensity of Alex's experience. His old age came with a violence. He later tells of his life as a coal miner and the hardships of working down the mines; but nothing compares to the suddenness of his getting old.

Consistent with a range of research findings, the meaning of feeling or being old is in experiencing a troublesome event (Cremin, 1992; Kaufman, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2000; Thompson, 1993).

With the rise of phenomenological methodologies for studying the meaning of things, and in particular the experience of aging, the voice of nursing scholars shows a dominance for nearly three decades. Studies using Parse's theory of nursing within a phenomenological framework have been used to explore being aged across five countries: the United States (Wondolowski & Davis, 1988), Nepal (Jonas, 1992), Scotland (Futrell, Wondolowski, & Mitchell, 1993), Canada (Mitchell, 1993, 1994) and Spain (Rendon, Sales, Leal, & Pique, 1995). In these studies the data analysis aims to 'reveal' a structural definition of aging and its interactive components. As the later studies all seem to be modelled on the Wondolowski and Davis project, only this study is reviewed in depth.

Participants were asked to describe a situation in which they experienced a "feeling of aging" (Wondolowski & Davis, 1988, p. 263). A hundred elders, aged 80 to 101 years, submitted a written or tape-recorded response. Extracts from the data showed people spoke in a generalised way as they reflected on experiences of aging. And they expressed their understandings of life and aging, rather than speaking about particular life events. Then, in order to interpret the stories, the researchers grouped the many hundreds of 'descriptive expressions' to form three elements. Brought together into a single sentence, these elements 'define' the aging experience as a "creative transfiguring in the presence of unfolding euphony enhanced by moments of transcendent voyaging" (Wondolowski & Davis, p. 266). Thus, in the search for a structural definition of aging, the meaning seems lost to the complexity of language. The language creates a shiny textual surface. It

reflects back its own complexity. As I read it, the meaning of aging is ‘known’ only to the researchers and those who can interpret their words.

Other nursing academics have researched elders’ experience of aging in Brazil (Caldas & Bertero, 2007), South Korea (Shin, Kim, & Kim, 2003), and three regions of United States; the rural Midwest (Hinck, 2004), the South Central ‘Bible Belt’ (Pascucci & Loving, 1997) and the South (Easley & Schaller, 2003). In addition, two relevant Scandinavian studies were located; one from Sweden (Nilsson et al., 2000) and a second collaborative study, including occupational therapy, nursing and medical researchers, from Finland (Heikkinen, 2004).

Bringing forward Heikkinen’s (2004) study, she explored what “being an older person means to the individual” (p. 568). She utilised a phenomenological methodology, guided by the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. The ten participants, aged 90, were all born in 1910. They formed a cohort within a longitudinal study of aging. Heikkinen interpreted four themes of meaning. Being an older person means reflecting on the aging experience and relationship to one’s body; temporality and a sense of being timeless; being at ease with one’s self; and Being-with in relationship to others. Again, as with the Wondolowski and Davis (1988) study, the participant quotes show they spoke in general terms about their life rather than describing particular events, as lived. However, these two projects are not alone in this respect. This same pattern showed across almost all of the narratives presented in the many articles considered for this literature review. From this generalised view, the meaning of being aged is in how it is thought about, rather than in the experience itself.

Interestingly, twenty years after the emphatic call to listen to older people’s experiences of aging, what remains “missing is a distinct view of the *everyday life of older people*” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 3). Thus, the call continues.

## **Being Aged as Appearance**

I suppose my own image of old age – before I got there myself – was just that. One of wrinkled skin, grey hair, a sort of arthritic slowness, and the idea that life was generally hard going. Now that I have reached that point

myself, the chronological age where in our society one is categorised as old, I have come to realise the implications of that view. The implication of what we call appearance. The way in which we allocate roles and positions in society in terms of people's appearance. The policeman with his uniform, the doctor with his white coat and stethoscope, the nun in her habit. And for the elderly it is their own skin which becomes their habit – their uniform. Some grey hair or a bent back, and you have the stigmata of old age. Well, it doesn't have to be that way...there can be a to-ing and fro-ing between young and old in which there is no place for such preconceptions. (Busch, 1991, p. 271)

These opening thoughts from John Morrison (Busch, 1991) reveal a tension between what is seen from the outside and the experience of being aged itself. From the outside, the visible features are taken to mean being old. John's description was one of the few direct accounts of the appearance of being aged that I uncovered within the literature. It stands in contrast to the abundance of material depicting how others, both younger and older, 'see' what being aged is. One such view is brought into sharp focus in a recent newspaper column. It reads: "A batty old woman glares out of a news photo. Her hair is lank and greying; her mouth sags as if she has suffered a stroke....She is Brigitte Bardot at 71" (Thomas, 2006, p. 23). Presumably these were not shocking words for the journalist to write; he was just saying how he saw it. He was using language to carry his vision to the readers. And describing appearance to portray a person as old is nothing new. In his "second sonnet, Shakespeare wrote, 'When forty winters shall besiege thy brow/ and dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field'" (as cited in Covey, 1992, p. 328). Had the journalist been a poet, he might equally have spoken these words to describe Brigitte Bardot.

Novelist, Katherine Mansfield (1978a) crafts her story through the eyes of a young woman as she looks at the stranger who enters her train compartment:

For a moment or two big tears brimmed her eyes and through them she saw the old man unwinding a scarf from his neck and untying the flaps of his Jaeger cap. He looked very old. Ninety at least. He had a white

moustache and big gold-rimmed spectacles with little blue eyes behind them and pink wrinkled cheeks....How spick and span he looked for an old man....Somehow, altogether, he was really nice to look at. Most old men were so horrid. She couldn't bear them doddery—or they had a disgusting cough or something. (pp. 26-27)

Thus, over centuries, writers have taken the appearance of wrinkles, sagging skin and greying hair as the symbolic, visible markers of aging and of others' being old (Calasanti, 2005). In recent times, some also speak of nations or the globe 'greying' to mean the phenomenon of population aging (Lookinland & Anson, 1995; Pascucci & Loving, 1997). And actors "will typically portray an old person with the exaggerated shakiness of Parkinson's Disease" (Thompson, 1993, p. 690). As such, the meaning of being aged is stereotyped as the appearance of aging.

Nearly forty years ago, the word 'ageism' was coined as a way of bringing into language "the systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old" (Calasanti, 2005, p. 8). Calasanti proposes that ageism is the only form of oppression that every one of us will experience, provided we are long-lived. Consequently, by perpetuating stereotypes of aging "we ultimately oppress ourselves" (Calasanti, p. 8). Thus, socially, the appearance of aging is used to differentiate those who are not yet old from those who are already old. "Bodies that appear to be aging confer the stigma that accrues to old age" (Calasanti, p. 9). Interestingly, Kontos (1999) considers whether it is this prevailing interest in the appearance of aging which underpins gerontology's emphases on the biological and social constructionist views of aging. This weighting of attention means other understandings of aging and being aged are less visible in the academic literature. And while there is an extraordinary volume of research on aging "there is less willingness to examine the assumptions which underpin our attitudes towards old age" (Bury & Holme, 1991, p. vii). Bury and Holme point to ageist attitudes as being taken-for-granted; they are just there. They are unseeingly within us and all around us.

However, in spite of the term ageism being widely utilised within academic circles, it is not in common usage within everyday language (Minichiello, Browne, & Kendig, 2000). The literary landscape shows a growing volume of theoretical and research publications on ageism as a health, educational and social issue (Barrett & Cantwell, 2007; Calasanti, 2005; Clark, 2002; Cruikshank, 2003; Lookinland & Anson, 1995; Oberg, 2003; Thornton, 2002). Yet there is a paucity of understanding about how older people themselves experience stereotyping (Minichiello et al.). Hence, Minichiello, Browne and Kendig designed their qualitative study to elicit older peoples' understandings and experiences of ageism. The 18 participants aged 65 to 89 all reported being active and able to do most things they wanted to do. Still, their stories contained experiences of both being seen, and of being treated, as old. Some also spoke of distancing themselves from those who, in their eyes, were old. Distancing was a not looking or acting old. It was a way of enacting a "new image of ageing" (Minichiello et al., p. 276). The front was put up as the participants' way of challenging others' stereotypical understandings of them as old.

Barrett and Cantwell (2007) took a different angle in exploring ageism. They invited 183 undergraduate university students to draw an image of a person who is elderly. The sketches revealed caricatures of "impairment, impotence, ugliness, and isolation" (Barrett & Cantwell, p. 344). Being aged, on the whole, showed a person using aids for walking, seeing or hearing; being wrinkled, bald or with thinning hair; and being expressionless or frowning. Being aged was captured in stereotypical appearances of old age. Yet elders also seem to use embodied appearance to judge oldness (Mitchell, 1993; Oberg, 2003). In Oberg's biographical study of older men and women, the participants were asked to gaze at their reflections in a mirror and describe what they saw. "It isn't a reflection of me. I know myself pretty well....Spiritually I don't feel old, like 'oh dear how old I am.' But I can see it in the appearance" said a 79-year-old (Oberg, p. 107). So it seems both young and old alike accept appearance as 'the uniform' of being aged.

## **Being Aged as a Social Category**

When I presented my first ‘senior citizen’ concession card to the ticket clipper at the gates to the Devonport ferry, I fully expected to be challenged as an obvious fraud, but the teenager on duty accepted my ticket with the most dismissive of sideways glances. I had to accept that, despite the perfectly spry way I felt, I was publicly classified among the old. It was definitely not one of life’s great moments. (Ireland, 2005, p. 34)

Kevin Ireland, now in his eighth decade of life, turned his attention to writing ‘on getting old.’ As a piece of satirical prose, his words twist the stark realities of his own experiences into everyday humour. He uses stories to tear away the front put up by everyday language. In the moment above, his experience reveals a social categorisation by age as a means of distinguishing the old from the not old. In reality, “learning to be old” (Cruikshank, 2003, p. 150) may simply be a matter of becoming conditioned into the old age category. Learning to be old may be learning to fit in with what others already expect.

Since ancient times, the notion of using chronological age to mark the beginning of something thought of as old age has persisted (Covey, 1992). Contemporary society and its members are organised on the basis of age (Calasanti, 2005; Covey). Particular freedoms, rights and responsibilities, entitlements and access to goods and services may all be tied with age. For example, being aged 65 is institutionalised in New Zealand as being an ‘older person’ (Minister for Senior Citizens, 2001). This puts us in line with many other contemporary societies (Covey). All the same, Degnen (2007) cautions:

while ‘oldness’ is a state of being that people in Western cultures agree exists, and ‘old age’ is a category which is readily used in daily discourse and upon which decisions are made in daily life, what old age is and who is old nevertheless remain problematic. (p. 69)

But in spite of criticisms, the notion of categorising the aged as a social group is endemic. Categorising means a category must be named. It must be called something or other. Looking across the academic literature, numerous

names in use. Categories name ‘the old’ (Carroll, 2007), ‘old people’ (Maclean, 2000), ‘older people’ (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005), ‘older adults’ (Futrell et al., 1993), ‘the elderly’ (van Maanen, 2006), ‘elders’ (Shellman, 2004), ‘seniors’ (Shin et al., 2003), ‘the third age’ (Bullington, 2006), and ‘the aged’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Alternatively, Clarke and Warren (2007) simply speak of their study’s participants as being “people aged 60-96 years” (p. 465). This proliferation of category names appears to be a contemporary phenomenon. It suggests writers are searching for a category name which is somehow better than the others which are in use. It suggests each name is somehow, subtly distinguished by what lies silently behind the language.

Overall, it is interesting to consider the temporal patterns in naming the aged as a category. Here, I looked at the prevalence of words used in the literature. It appears talk is moving away from ‘the old’ towards referring to ‘older people’ or ‘older persons.’ Although, Cruikshank (2003) offers the criticism that “the word ‘older’ is sometimes a euphemism for ‘old’” (p. 141). This suggests we really mean ‘old’ but soften the word by saying ‘older.’ Euphemistically used, the unspoken meaning of the word is not altered. Nonetheless, the shifts in terminology allude to a growing awareness of the unspoken presuppositions. It shows a peering beyond the ‘shiny’ surface of language.

But what of those who are implicated in the naming? I found only one reference to a study of the acceptability of category names to elders. Americans aged 65 and older were surveyed (Frieden, 1993). Only 8 percent of respondents felt the term ‘old’ was an acceptable way of describing themselves. The great majority also “objected to ‘older American,’ ‘golden-ager,’ ‘old timer,’ [and] ‘aged person’” (Frieden, p. 36). In comparison, slightly more than half “accepted the terms ‘senior citizen,’ ‘mature American,’ or ‘retired person’ for themselves” (Frieden, p. 36). Unfortunately, being a survey, there was no exploration of what the commonly used terms meant to the respondents, the results just tell us how unacceptable the words were.

Furthermore, creating a single age category for the ‘old’ is problematic in other ways. Increasingly the over-65 group embraces a diversity of ages and lived

experiences. “As compared to other parts of the life course, the social category of ‘old age’ is a remarkably broad term” (Degnen, 2007, p. 69). It spans at least 40 years. It groups the 65-year-olds with the 105-year-olds. Even the ancient Greek scholars thought about how to distinguish “between the beginning of old age and advanced old age” (Covey, 1992, pp. 326-327). But breaking down the whole category of ‘old age’ into age sub-categories is itself enigmatic. The literature shows the use of different approaches to distinguish when an ‘older’ old age begins.

‘Population-based’ methods use calculations of average longevity to work out where the division should occur. In the Western world this means an ‘older’ old age would begin at about 85. In comparison, ‘person-based’ definitions use individual measures of ‘aging.’ One way is to use *a priori* criteria to assess a person’s potential for improvements in their quality of life. A shift from a positive to a negative potential thus marks a beginning of ‘older’ old age. However, the threshold may be crossed at “60 for some or 90 for others” (Baltes & Smith, 2003, p. 125). From the view I took across the literary landscape, chronological age bands were most commonly used as signifying ‘age’ sub-categories. Naming them varies but the age divisions seem relatively constant; being 65 to 74, 75 to 84 and 85 years and older (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Yet the apparent simplicity of this age-based method covers over the complexities suggested by the other ways of categorisation.

Which ever method is used, one phenomenon stands out; the contemporary academic interest in those living beyond the average lifespan. And just as the interest has intensified, the words used to name this sub-category have multiplied. Researchers are speaking of the ‘very old’ (Nilsson et al., 2000), ‘very old persons’ (Caldas & Bertero, 2007), ‘advanced old age’ (Heikkinen, 2004), ‘very advanced age’ (Agren, 1998), ‘the oldest old’ (Haggblom-Kronlof, Hultberg, Eriksson, & Sonn, 2007), ‘the fourth age’ (Baltes & Smith, 2003), ‘late old age’ (Gitlin et al., 2006), and ‘extreme old age’ (Bury & Holme, 1991). Perhaps the most evocative example comes from Wondolowski and Davis (1988). They conclude their article by recommending that further phenomenological

research should include the aging experiences of the “confined oldest old and the elite oldest old” (Wondolowski & Davis, p. 269).

The languaged categories create their own ‘fronts and surfaces.’ Beyond age markers, the meanings in the words are left to speak for themselves. Consequently, Degnen (2007) criticises gerontologists for stumbling “their way through denoting differences which are believed to exist but whose boundaries are contested and blurred” (p. 70). Nonetheless, the categorisation of the ‘young old,’ the ‘old’ and the ‘old old’ seems firmly entrenched within academic dialogue. And again it seems we can run out of words to bring understandings into language. To illustrate, participants in Easley and Schaller’s (2003) phenomenological study said things like “I don’t feel any different than when I was 18” (p. 276), and “I am too much trouble; I can’t go out anymore” (p. 275). They were aged 85 to 99 yet they did not speak of being ‘old’ old or even of being ‘old.’ Nonetheless Easley and Schaller suggest their findings “will help health professionals better understand...the experiences of being old-old” (p. 277). They hear one language and communicate with professional peers in another. They speak in words ordinarily used in the practice and academic domains. This ‘ordinary language’ is that which is “the unnoticed, but ever-present discourse of everyday usage” (Sandywell, 2004, p. 162). Hence, being sensitive to participants’ meanings and being easily understood by colleagues may mean two languages must exist side-by-side.

One article stands out through its use of a different language. Pascucci and Loving (1997) refer to the decade which their participants belong to. Accordingly, their research “elicited centenarians’ meanings of longevity” (Pascucci & Loving, p. 199). Their language is descriptive in nature and in this way they avoid categorising their participants as being the ‘oldest old,’ or similar. When referring to the literature, instead of simply picking up other authors’ language, Pascucci and Loving describe other studies’ participants as “long-lived persons,” “centenarians” or “octogenarian and nonagenarians” (p. 201). Their words point to a thoughtful use of language. But the messages are conflicting. Participants in their study were screened for mental capacity at entry. This selection method alludes to an already-there expectation of centenarians’ diminished mental

capacity. The screening method used suggests they suspect a coherent story may not be told by someone aged 100 or more. This seeming incongruence, of sensitivity to categorising the participants while holding expectations of how being a centenarian might show, could be resolved if presuppositions were uncovered. And it could be resolved by taking up a practice of looking beyond the front put up by language. Instead I am left wondering.

Language, however, not only conveys meaning, it is built on meanings. The word ‘old’ or ‘ald’ stems “from the root *al-*, to nourish” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 794), to grow, or to grow up. Thus historically, ‘althas’ meant a grown up or adult (Harper, 2001). So presumably categorising ‘grown ups’ aged 65 years and over as ‘the old’ is simply an extension of the word’s etymology. Yet colloquial usage of ‘old’ leans towards a meaning of being “decayed by the process of time, worn, or dilapidated” (Hayward & Sparkes, p. 794). So while the words themselves may be correctly used, to call someone old in everyday terms seems to fall back on a meaning of being decrepit. So if being old can mean being decrepit, what does this signify for the popular mode of referring to the ‘oldest old?’ Thornton (2002) proposes that “language and its embedded metaphors used to construct the current myths of aging draw on these embodied categories, concepts, and frames, and create our social stereotypes about aging” (p. 307). He suggests the words as taking on a life of their own.

So while categorising by age may have no meaning in terms of everyday experiences, categorisation confers a “powerfully stigmatising label” (Degnen, 2007, p. 75). Thus it seems being aged as a category casts a long shadow. Categorising masks what is.

## **Being Aged as Being Wise**

“As Turi grew older, so did Granny.... ‘When Granny goes,’ people would say, ‘who will teach songs and poi<sup>6</sup> and tukutuku<sup>7</sup> weaving then? Only she knows all these things’ (Powell, 1963, p. 28).

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<sup>6</sup> Poi refers to a posture dance done with “flax balls on a string” (Walker, 1990, p. 297).

<sup>7</sup> Tukutuku are “decorative wall panels in a meeting house” (Walker, 1990, p. 298).

In the children's storybook, Turi is a young Maori boy who is raised by 'Granny.' She is his great grandmother. Like the tukutuku panels Granny weaves, Powell intertwines the threads of indigenous wisdom into the fictional text. And, just like the intricately patterned weavings, Granny links her people to their past, their present and their future. When Granny goes, another woman will pick up teaching songs, poi and tukutuku weaving just as Granny did before her. Thus the story behind the storyline is of chosen indigenous lines of intergenerational wisdom.

Granny is an elder. Being an elder speaks of being recognised as being wise within the Maori community, rather than being a reference to chronological age (Waldon, 2004). And we hear in Manuhuia Bennett's following account of being a kaumatau how being wise is more than being a repository of indigenous knowledge and skills. Born in 1916, he became New Zealand's first Anglican Maori bishop.

In the Maori world, as an old person you have quite a role amongst your peers and amongst the younger group. You're kaumatau....[You] keep the balance in the tribe. When there's anything that can't be resolved through normal channels, they leave it to the kaumatau to make a decision on it, then the whole tribe follows....But it's not as easy as it used to be...That's because the old pa<sup>8</sup> life has gone. The old Maori community is broken up. (Maclean, 2000, pp. 64-65)

Manuhuia points to the challenges of being in a contemporary context whilst carrying on more traditional responsibilities as a Maori elder. But while communities change, several regional studies show elders as continuing to engage in intergenerational relationships. The relating is a fundamental way of passing on wisdom. And contemporary indigenous communities continue to seek out elders in order to impart wisdom through their participation in traditional ceremonies (Waldon, 2004; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2007). The Oranga Kaumatua study is particularly prominent within the New Zealand context. Focusing primarily on elders' health and wellbeing, 429 Maori aged 60 years and older were surveyed.

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<sup>8</sup> Pa refers to a traditional "fortified village" (Ryan, 1989, p. 37).

Of the volunteers, seventy percent were active in traditional Maori ways on marae<sup>9</sup> (Waldon). This shows respected elders as being richly represented in the study. They reported being aged as meaning an increased responsibility to take up marae-based activities. And they thought being called upon was linked to their fluency in the Maori language and their expectation of teaching others (Waldon). Some spoke of being called upon as being burdensome. But this in turn was balanced out by the respect and everyday assistance they felt they received from the Maori community (Waldon). Being wise as an elder Maori is, therefore, revealed as ‘being Maori.’ Wisdom appears in everyday Maoriness.

Yet what might be thought of as wisdom is not the preserve of indigenous peoples. Listening to Gisi Hirschfeld’s reflections on her life in old age throws a different light upon the thinking about being aged as being wise.

I have plenty of time to contemplate. The more I use my brain the better it becomes. You become wiser. While you have children who need you and have a husband and friends to discuss things, you don’t have as much time to contemplate. But sitting here and having nothing to do and going nowhere I have a lot of time to think. It makes things clearer. You understand people more, become more compassionate; you are not so concentrated on yourself any more....My great-grandchildren came to me one day and said ‘Gisi, we’ll be sad when you die.’ I said ‘Of course. Not only will you be sad, but your mummy and your daddy will be sad. They will even cry when I die. But after the third day they will laugh again sometimes and then they will forget about me.’ And the children jumped away and were happy. I had solved the problem for them. (Maclean, 2000, p. 59)

What Gisi’s story shows is wisdom as a temporal, lived experience. Her wisdom is acquired over time. Her wisdom appears as a way of thinking about things. And perhaps through the story-telling itself, she comes to understand her own ‘ordinary wisdom.’ “This wisdom is ordinary in the sense that it is

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<sup>9</sup> Marae is the “community meeting place where formal greetings and discussions take place in front of the wharenuia” [meeting house] (Moorfield, 1988, p. 151)

accessible, contained within the stories we are....The wisdom is accessible through telling and listening to stories" (Kenyon, 2003, p. 30). In this way, ordinary wisdom might be likened to Randall and McKim's (2004) notion of 'growing' old, rather than simply 'getting' old. Growing old is about gaining an enriched understanding of one's own life story. It is about a deepening appreciation of the complexities, mysteries and meaningfulness of one's life (Randall & McKim). This is the everyday contemplativeness of which Gisi speaks.

So what is this phenomenon we name wisdom? And what place might it hold in the broader context of being aged? Bobbio (2001) points to something which is hinted at within the opening story about Turi's Granny. That is, in slowly evolving traditional societies the aged encapsulated "a community's cultural heritage more fully than any of its other members" (Bobbio, p. 5). Yet, speaking as one who is 'old' in a modernised world, Bobbio himself experiences an increasing sense of estrangement from society. He describes experiencing and seeing older people as being increasingly marginalised. His wisdom is outmoded in the face of hastening social change. Hence, his essay ponders 'Where is all this supposed wisdom?' Bobbio concludes, "increasingly the old are not in the know, while youth is" (p. 5). However, this interpretation reduces wisdom to forms of contemporary knowledge and skills alone. Philosophically, it seems that being outdated somehow does not equate to the subtleties of being wise. Besides, most societies engage in "narratives that both denigrate aging and that honour or enable it" (Bruner, 1999, p. 9). Thus metaphors of being aged as being outdated can reside comfortably alongside metaphors of being wise.

One definition of wisdom describes it as the holding of "knowledge and experience together with the ability to make use of them rightly" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 1281). This meaning points to a wisdom that Manuhua Bennett referred to. It points to a contextualised morality and a thoughtfulness in making prudent decisions. And as old wisdom has it, we get wiser as we age. Going back to ancient Greece, Philo of Alexandria is recorded as saying "the soul blossoms in comprehension when the excellence of the body is dilapidated by old age" (Wortley, 1997, p. 192). Good examples of being aged as being wise are also

found in early literature. Aesop's fables, such as 'The fishermen who netted stones' and 'The wolves, the sheep and the ram,' are richly imbued with allegories of the "aged-wise" (Wortley, p. 190). Yet in spite of this long-held association, the phenomenon of wisdom in aging has been mostly neglected as a topic of gerontological inquiry (Kenyon, Ruth, & Mader, 1999; Randall & Kenyon, 2004). But this is changing. Wisdom in aging is showing as a thread of recent interest (Ardelt, 1997).

If indeed the soul does blossom with age, is it merely a consequence of being long-lived (Kenyon et al., 1999)? And is wisdom "one thing, or many, or even a 'thing' as such" (Randall & Kenyon, 2004, p. 339)? As Gisi alluded to in her story of guiding her great-grandchildren, some suggest wisdom is a 'practical wisdom.' Being aged may then be the ground in which this form of phronetic wisdom flourishes (Randall & Kenyon). Bobbio (2001) suggests the wise "old person knows from experience what the others have yet to learn in terms of morals, customs and the techniques of survival" (p. 5). More experience may grow more wisdom. And attempts have been made to discern 'what' wisdom is by implementing a self-assessed 'wisdom scale' (Webster, 2003). Others have sought to understand how experiencing things, observing, listening and contemplating culminate as 'acquired' wisdom. Yet others show an interest in a kind of 'infused' wisdom which may come from directly experiencing spiritual phenomena such as communion with God (Randall & Kenyon). Randall and Kenyon focus their research on the 'how' of wisdom through exploring the narrative perspective of story-telling in advanced age. Their central assumption is that "whatever wisdom is understood to be...it comes alive only in our unique wisdom stories" (Randall & Kenyon, p. 339).

Perhaps most importantly, Randall and Kenyon (2004) raise a number of poignant, contemplative questions. "How does a wise person *become* wise? If it is a function of living...then how does this come about?"...."Do particular environments, whether cultural, institutional, or ideological, facilitate the expression of our wisdom?"....Rather than originating from one's life direction, "might there be wisdom involved in the road not taken"....And rather than showing through words, might it be expressed "in silence as well, or through a

touch or glance” (Randall & Kenyon, pp. 341-342)? They do not offer answers to their questions. The questions are raised as a way of engaging with the enigmatic explorations of wisdom in aging.

Minichiello, Browne and Kendig (2000) raise a further concern. Making the assumption that an aged person is wise, a sage, may simply be a form of positive stereotyping. “With sageism, people interact with older people as venerated elders who are respected for their knowledge and experience. There is potential for negative effects, however, if the elder cannot meet such expectations” (Minichiello et al., p. 268). Hence working to uncover one’s already-there presuppositions and being open to the ways that wisdom may appear, seem to lie at the heart of apprehending wisdom in the context of aging. The search to understand what wisdom is, and how it plays out in being aged, may simply serve to not see it at all, to actively conceal it, or to see it as a semblance, something it is not.

## **Being Aged as Decrepitude**

Ka put e ruha  
 Ka hao te rangatahi  
 The old net is cast aside  
 The new net goes fishing

(Department of Health, 1982, p. 1).

Through symbolism, this Maori proverb refers to the age-old cycle of life. Tired and worn through work, the old net is no longer able to catch fish as it once did. The metaphor is echoed in Norberto Bobbio’s (2001) words as he speaks of his own decline into decrepitude:

‘I’m increasingly falling apart’, I recently told an old friend. He replied with a slightly mocking air: ‘You’ve been telling me that for twenty years.’ But the truth is—and it is difficult to explain this to anyone much younger—that the descent into the void is long, much longer than I would have ever imagined, and slow, so slow as to appear almost imperceptible (although not to me). (p. 16)

Locating metaphorical images of aging as decrepitude was easy. Many writers of classical poetry, theatre and literature make reference to the infirmity of aging. Yeats' (1904/1983) poem 'The old men admiring themselves in the water' illustrates the genre in few words:

I heard the old, old men say,  
 'Everything alters,  
 And one by one we drop away.'  
 They had hands like claws, and their knees  
 Were twisted like the old thorn trees  
 By the waters.  
 I heard the old, old men say,  
 'All that's beautiful drifts away  
 Like the waters' (p. 82).

His use of the allegoric is a powerfully descriptive mechanism and makes the images very memorable. They must have caught Janet Frame's imagination as she interweaves Yeats' allegories with her own in 'The secret.' It is a short story about two young sisters. We hear Nini's thoughts when she is told her big sister is very sick and may 'go' at any time:

Myrtle couldn't die. Grandma had died, but then Grandma was old with no legs and a shrivelled up face like an old brown walnut...and Grandad had died but Grandad was old too, he must have been living for years and years before the beginning of the world, he was like one of the old men in the poem, whose hands are like claws and whose knees are twisted like the old thorn trees. (Frame, 1990b, p. 14)

Thus metaphor is a potent means of engaging the reader. In this instance we are able to 'see' Nini's aged grandparents as she saw them. Narrative extracts from research participants also show the use of similes to convey their experiences of aging and of later life. A participant in Mitchell's (1993) study wrote "being a senior means a diminishing. It is something like a waning moon, pinch-faced and pressed against the night sky. But now, the shadowed light pulls inward all the edges and every form seems hunched for a diminishing" (p. 55).

Collectively, the words convey the experience of being aged as a decaying into meagreness.

Being aged as being ‘frail’ perhaps epitomises the metaphor of decrepitude. Frail means fragile. Being fragile means something is “easily broken, or weak” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 456). We speak of objects, like egg shells or fine china, as being fragile. And in gerontology, being frail is widely used to mean something about being aged. The word is usually left to speak for itself. Its prevalence in the literature shows researching ‘frailty’ as being a core thread of interest (Johannesen, Petersen, & Avlund, 2004). Amid all the empirical research, one narrative study appeared (Grenier, 2006). In the article, Alice’s story is illustrative of the older women’s experiences of ‘living with frailty.’ Alice lives alone. She has returned home after eight months in hospital following a hip fracture. She uses pads for her incontinence, receives assistance with bathing, and has rails and assistive equipment fitted throughout the home. In terms of her medical classification, Alice ‘is’ frail. She tells of her body not doing what it ‘used to do’ and of not being able to go out on her balcony alone (Grenier). But Alice does not think of herself as ‘being’ frail. Grenier thus interprets the story as Alice experiencing “moments of ‘feeling’ frail” (p. 309). The language of ‘frailty’ appears like a form of academic shorthand. Within the scholarly literature, the language of ‘feeling frail’ communicates a sense of Alice’s decrepitude. Yet again I am reminded of the paradox of finding language which both honours participants’ meanings and is recognised as ordinary language within the academic environment.

Language may also hint at a thinking which is not there or not intended to be there. Or it may allude to an unspoken negativity. For example, saying ‘even’ can express an unexpectedness or surprise (Cruikshank, 2003; Hayward & Sparkes, 1982). Hinck (2004) concludes that remaining at home is a strong value of “even the oldest-old” (p. 789). Is she emphasising the point, or do the words reveal surprise? Similarly, saying ‘still’ can mean “even till now” (Hayward & Sparkes, p. 1115). Agren (1998) comments that “a few participants were still quite active and intellectually alert at ninety-two” (p. 109). Again, does she show an unexpectedness of 92-year-olds being active and intellectually alert? In this

seemingly innocent way, the language hints at an understanding of being aged as being decrepit.

Popular opinion might suggest that younger people are more likely to frame being aged as being decrepit, but research shows otherwise. Degnen's (2007) ethnographic fieldwork took her into weekly tea and bingo gatherings at a senior citizen's centre in the north of England. One lady, Mrs Atherton, was singled out as 'being old' because of her evident advancing decrepitude, not because she was older. The others noticed she wasn't getting about as easily and they noticed things which suggested her mind was starting 'to go.' Degnen concludes that "although oldness is stigmatised as much by older people as it is by younger adults, older people use different criteria to demarcate old age and oldness" (p. 77). The elders in Degnen's study looked for signs of oldness amongst their social acquaintances. They monitored how others were getting on, compared themselves with others and, in groups, talked about others' changes in mental and bodily functions. Others' oldness showed as signs of decrepitude. Similarly, other studies have shown that older people think of their peers as being old when they notice a decline in their functional ability (Hinck, 2007).

Contextually, a language of being aged as decrepitude may be an endemic feature of the research and social landscapes. Gerontology itself has been defined as "the science dealing with the phenomena of deterioration and decay in the aged" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 486). More recently though, definitions show a neutrality; defining gerontology as a 'study of aging' (Markson, 2003). All the same, the field has been criticised for having a "persistent preoccupation with disability, disease, and chronological age rather than with the positive aspects of aging" (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. xi). Rowe and Kahn were not suggesting aging holds no negatives; merely that researching the positives has been left standing in the shadows. Although currently this perspective is being balanced by a "tendency to redescribe aging as a time of activity, social engagement, and productivity rather than that of decline and dependency" (Biggs, 2005, p. S118). My listening to the metaphor of being aged as decrepitude is just that. I am not suggesting that other metaphors do not exist. Hence, I bring in some balance with this last metaphor.

## **Being Aged as Being Explained**

The metaphor of being aged as being explained is drawn from the multiplicity of theories evident within the gerontological landscape. Theory seeks to show and explain ‘truths.’ Hence, theories in gerontology seek to explain truths about aging and the aged. Theories take account of empirical research findings by way of constructing clear explanations for things (Bengston & Schaie, 1999). Within gerontology the search for explanatory truths is seen to cluster around three overarching queries; the concerns and problems of the aged, the developmental processes of aging and the study of age itself.

Given gerontology’s origins amid the rise of empirical science, research has emphasised knowing ‘the facts’ in order to explain the cause and effect of phenomena related to aging and the aged (Berman, 1994). Accordingly, knowledge emerging from the positivist, scientific paradigm has taken centre stage (Berman, 1994; Markson, 2003; Victor, 1987). Hence, on the whole, “gerontological research and theories of ageing have had a normative impact on what ageing should be like” (Nilsson et al., 2000, p. 46). In saying this, Nilsson suggests the search for theoretical knowledge has yielded a generalised understanding of aging. It shows us what aging, on average, looks like. However, the trend towards gerontology’s diversification as a multidisciplinary field means its future may look quite different than its past. Amidst the long-standing voices of geriatricians and psychologists, are now heard those of sociologists, anthropologists, human geographers, nurses and occupational therapists (Markson). While this brings a diversification of interests and questions to the research landscape, the present emphasis remains on the scientific.

Next I bring forward three theoretical explanations of aging. Each is briefly described before showing how the ideas play out within a research project. In selecting the three views I considered their theoretical variance as well as their potential to contribute to understanding being aged in the everyday. Numerous other theories and models exist but are left standing in the shadows within the context of this literature review.

## **Activity Theory**

Activity theory has its roots in the early 1960s. Havighurst's foundational premise was that "normal and successful ageing involves preserving, for as long as possible, the attitudes and activities of middle age" (Victor, 1987, p. 37). Thus aging well is viewed as being actively engaged in the everyday and social worlds. It means retaining some activities; adapting others and substituting different activities for those relinquished (Chapman, 2005). In this way activity theory stood in stark contrast to the other competing theory of the day, disengagement theory (Victor). And rather than remaining in its original caste, activity theory continues to evolve. Of contemporary interest is the relationship between participation in activities and one's happiness and life satisfaction (Chapman, 2005; Glass, Mendes de Leon, Marottoli, & Berkman, 1999; Lennartson & Silverstein, 2001; Markson, 2003; Menec, 2003; Ouwehand, de Ridder, & Bensing, 2007). In theory, the more actively engaged person will likely show a greater happiness and satisfaction in life (Estes, Linkins, & Binney, 2001).

Menec's (2003) longitudinal study explored the relationship between activities and indicators of aging well with over 1400 people aged 67 to 95. For the research, aging well was operationalised as standardised measures of wellbeing, functional ability, happiness and life satisfaction over a six-year time frame. The participants' everyday activities were measured using a 21-item checklist. What showed? Over the six years, the more active participants were more likely to have survived, to show greater wellbeing and to experience less functional decline. And different activities seemed to afford different benefits. For example, doing solitary activities like hobbies and handcrafts was associated with high levels of happiness. And the only activities to show a strong relationship with life satisfaction were sports or games. Overall, getting older meant everyday activity levels declined yet without a corresponding reduction in happiness (Menec).

So what do these findings tell us? Patterns of everyday activities are seen yet other information remains hidden. The a priori activity checklist, for example, will have excluded some activities and may not have included those deemed most important to the person. Hence this approach may hide as much as it shows. And

it tells us those who survived over the six years were more active. But we do not know whether activity promotes longevity in advanced age. It may be that being aged and well, and destined for a long life, means a person is likely to remain active for longer. These limitations, however, come hand-in-hand with the methodology. The findings suggest something might be going on between being active and having a long happy life. As such, this study lends its voice to the ongoing search for explaining and predicting aging well through engagement in everyday activities. It is one small piece of a large puzzle.

### **Theory of Selective Optimization with Compensation**

Selective optimisation with compensation is a “theory of effective life management” (Baltes & Smith, 2003, p. 132). Described by Margaret and Paul Baltes in 1990, it draws on the assumption that one’s life goals, and how they are achieved, will change over the course of life. That is, life mastery shows in selecting certain activities, compensating for loss and optimising engagement in response to changes with aging. Accordingly, the theory aims to explain processes of successful aging (Ouwehand et al., 2007). Philosophically, its foundations align with Atchley’s continuity theory (Strain, Grabusic, Searle, & Dunn, 2002). And, looking at the scope of subsequent research, it is viewed as a theory with promise (Freund & Baltes, 2002; F. Lang, Rieckmann, & Baltes, 2002; Ouwehand et al., 2007).

The theory is perhaps best captured in Rubinstein’s story at 80 years of age (Baltes & Smith, 2003). When asked about his continued recognition as a concert pianist Rubinstein said “he played fewer pieces, but practiced them more often, and he used contrasts in tempo to simulate faster playing than he in the meantime could master” (Baltes & Smith, p. 132). In other words he selected his repertoire, optimised his performance through focusing his practice and compensated for his diminished speed of movement. Thus the theory is viewed as an adaptive focusing or redirecting resources, mostly intrinsic, in response to declining function and everyday demands (Freund & Baltes, 2002; F. Lang et al., 2002).

Bringing the theory into research, Lang, Rieckmann and Baltes (2002) explored the association between elders' capacities and resources, and their use of everyday adaptive strategies over a four-year time span. The 206 participants, aged between 70 and 103, were enrolled in the Berlin Aging Study. Information about what the person did in the day and the adaptive strategies used were categorised using the Yesterday Interview. For example, an increase in regenerative activities like resting or sleeping was categorised as 'compensation' (F. Lang et al., 2002). What the findings suggest is that older people are more likely to survive and to compensate for everyday losses when they have more intrinsic resources to call on, such as better balance and greater visual acuity (F. Lang et al.).

What might this study be telling us? Elders who creatively selected and optimised their life activities, and who compensated for changes which happened, were more likely to survive over a four-year time span. Being 'resource-rich' in terms of functional capacities and social resources seemed to 'predict' successful life management when aging. Again, a pattern shows but we can't be sure. What comes first, the capacities which enable the engaging in particular activities, or is it the other way around? And does creative management of the everyday promote a long life, or is it the reverse? Methodologically, assumptions and interpretations are in play but remain somewhat concealed within the research approach. For example, those who coded the everyday activities were looking for 'evidence' of selecting, optimising or compensating as defined by the theory. Coding is an interpretive rather than an 'objective' activity. Still, the findings suggest something of interest may be going on. They add a new facet in the search to explain how individuals 'age' in the everyday.

### **Gerotranscendence**

Gerotranscendence is a theory of human growth and change in growing older. As a recent addition to the field, it was first described by Tornstam in 1989. Through the gerotranscendence lens, 'growing' into old age is characterised by a philosophical shift from materialism to a more transcendent, meta-perspective on life. Theoretically then, finding pleasure in contemplative solitude will increase

with age (Tornstam, 1997). A ‘cosmic transcendence’ is thus experienced as “an increased feeling of unity with the universe; a redefinition of the perception of time, space, life and death; and a growing affinity with past and future generations” (Braam, Bramsen, Van Tilburg, Van Der Ploeg, & Deeg, 2006, p. S121). This suggests the nature and meaning of growing into being aged is particular to the aged.

Tornstam (2004) signals the theory as being a philosophical shift towards a phenomenological gerontology. Yet its standing within the gerontological field demands a scientific credibility. Therefore Tornstam’s ‘scale of gerotranscendence’ and two sub-scales were designed for use within empirical studies. In spite of this seeming philosophical confusion, in practice, gerotranscendence is finding a place in the field of nursing and care of the older person (Jonson & Magnusson, 2001). My search of the scholarly landscape uncovered few scientific studies underpinned by gerotranscendence (Atchley, 1997; Braam et al., 2006; Tornstam, 1997; Wadensten, 2005). The theory’s recency and perhaps its limited scope of appeal may be why.

Illuminating one of the above projects, Braam et al.’s (2006) cross-sectional study explored the relationship between cosmic transcendence and meaning in life. In addition, they examined whether religiousness, age or gender influenced any association between the two. The 928 randomly-selected participants were born between 1920 and 1929. A potent relationship was revealed. Elders who showed high levels of ‘cosmic transcendence,’ according to the Cosmic Transcendence Subscale, also scored highly on Debat’s ‘framework of meaning in life’ scale. This was particularly so for women and those who were 75 years and older, widowed, or had no religious affiliation (Braam et al.).

What might these findings tell us? They suggest an emerging importance of ‘cosmic transcendence’ as we age. But we cannot tell whether the participants’ existentialist views emerged with being aged, or whether the findings simply show individual differences (Braam et al., 2006). A longitudinal study would yield richer understandings in this respect. And we cannot tell if what is framed as a gerotranscendence actually leads to an enhanced sense of wellbeing in advanced

age. As with most studies it points to new questions for exploration. But its appeal to practitioners working with the aged suggests the theory has something to offer. Here I echo the words of Muriel Morrison spoken earlier in this chapter. She seems to explain what gerotranscendence is:

Yes, I think so, I have lived long enough to see the richness in old age.

Now I see every little thing that has happened as part of the total thing—call it a fabric, if you like—into which all is woven. (Busch, 1991, p. 260)

### **Across the Theoretical Divide**

A tension shows behind the theories illuminated. It is the tension between empirical ‘truths’ and lived experiences. The search to see the ‘facts’ and to explain phenomena may serve to conceal what is. And the dominance of empiricism within gerontology suggests a devaluing of other ways of knowing. This does not make gerontology wrong; it means there are many more questions to be asked. It means there are other ways to listen. It means there are other things to be heard. And it means there are other ways to move towards knowing something of aging and the aged.

### **A Reflection**

Surveying the literary landscape was a listening for the meanings and metaphors already present in the literature. I was guided by the philosophical presupposition that language is a ‘textual surface’ and therefore shows something ‘as’ something. Key words used to unearth relevant literature were pre-chosen as a way of framing the field of vision amid a vast landscape. Within this frame, the search was both deep and wide revealing popular and scholarly literature. A ‘listening ear’ was kept attuned to the voices of those who have first-hand experience of being aged. Six metaphors were heard: being aged as lived experience, as appearance, as social category, as being wise, as decrepitude and as being explained. In bringing forward a range of voices contributing to the meanings present in the literature, at times the elder voice showed as being in accord with the academic voice. At other times discord was illuminated. Together, what shows alludes to a need for those of us who are not yet aged to be always mindful of what we are ‘seeing,’ ‘hearing’ and ‘speaking.’ This means being

mindful of the ‘long shadows’ cast by the social, philosophical, theoretical and scientific understandings we already carry. Each has the potential to overshadow the understanding of being aged as it is lived. Questions concerning the nature of understanding are addressed in the next chapter which describes the philosophical notions that guided this study.

LISTEN—voices speak

It is us; the empiricists. We speak of ‘knowing’

Listen closely—A voice speaks softly

It is me; the aged. I speak of how it is

Words—The w o r d s echo e c h o

Reflecting off the landscape’s surface

Coming back—Sounding like something else

Concealing what lies behind ~~as something else~~

Being aged as lived

I am just concentrating on living

And being and doing

Being aged as appearance

~~WRINKLED~~ skin, grey hair, arthritic s l o w n e s s

Are my habit, my body’s front

Being aged as category

Publicly classified among The Old

The Aged, Seniors, Very Old Persons, the Oldest Old

Being aged as wisdom

Sitting, going nowhere, time to think

Seeing the multiplicity, the mystery, the meaningfulness

Being aged as decrepitude

Frail. *Fragile* like grandma’s old bone china

With hands like claws and knees twisted like the old thorn trees

Being aged as being explained

Proved as ‘truth,’ cause accounted for

Theories 1, 2, 3.....10, 11, 12.....across the theoretical divide

## Chapter Three: The Philosophical Underpinnings

Way and weighing

Stile and saying

On a single walk are found.

Go bear without halt

Question and default

On your single pathway bound

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 3).

What lies behind, in front, under and over my pathway through this study is brought to the fore in this chapter. I show the ‘weighing;’ what was pondered and carefully considered in finding my way. I point out the ‘stiles;’ the things which enabled me to cross from the thinking to a research methodology. And I reveal how questioning uncovered the path itself.

The origins of Gadamerian hermeneutics and Heideggerian phenomenology are introduced as providing the philosophical milieu. I illustrate how these philosophical understandings were brought into play in guiding the research approach. Rather than being in a linear and stepwise movement, being on the research pathway was a dynamic motion. It was a moving to and from the philosophies and back again. It was a stepping off the path and finding my way back again. Hence, the philosophical underpinnings are just that. They provide a template of understandings, rather than being a research methodology as such. The way forward was thoughtful and reflective. All was not laid out bare, there in front of me, at the beginning of my research journey. The way emerged throughout the whole of the study.

## The Nature of the Inquiry

Exploring how elders experience aging in their everyday lives was a mode of philosophical reflectiveness. While the research question is of contemporary interest, the philosophical thinking reaches back to ancient Greece. Being engaged in this mode of inquiry meant the past was before me. The past showed me how I might proceed next. Firstly, hermeneutics is introduced as the broad philosophical horizon for my inquiry. Hermeneutics helped guide the ‘how’ of this study.

## The Dialectical Conversation

Recognised as one of the great Athenian philosophers, Socrates [before 469—399 B.C.] held that “virtue was knowledge, and knowledge was to be elicited by the dialectical technique....His aim was to act as a midwife to those in labour for knowledge” (Thorne & Collocott, 1974, p. 1193). Accordingly, in conversation with his followers, Socrates would feign total ignorance on a matter and ask simple questions. His dialectical approach was one of artful conversation. Through the questioning and questioning further, thinking was clarified and gaps in thinking were uncovered (Gadamer, 2004). In this way, Socrates opened up the conversational space. He allowed confusion to show. Yet, paradoxically, in the confusion came clarification “for it opens one’s eyes to the thing” (Gadamer, p. 460).

The art of dialectic was further developed by Plato [427—347 B.C.], one of Socrates’ disciples. True knowledge, Plato believed, was in apprehending the universal nature of things (Thorne & Collocott, 1974). Universal forms exist in their timelessness; they are time-honoured. Yet in spite of their constancy they can exist in different ways. This contemplation of the relationship between the enduring forms of a thing and particular instances of it became a cornerstone of Plato’s thinking (Thorne & Collocott). Hence, his art of dialectical conversation showed an interpretive movement between the thing in its wholeness, the universal form, and its parts, the particular occurrences of it. This interpretive movement was a way of coming to a ‘truth’ in understanding.

Seeking understanding through the dialectical conversation is, therefore, an open engagement in raising questions and exploring answers. While for

Socrates and Plato the conversation occurred between scholar and disciples, their way laid the path for a dialectic engagement with the written word. Their thinking paved the way for hermeneutics to emerge as the interpretation of texts (Gadamer, 2004).

My pathway through this project has been one of learning to question and questioning yet further. I sought to use questioning as a way of remaining open to possibilities of understanding. To illustrate, I raised questions of what I already knew about being aged and questions of the philosophies themselves. This guided my drafting ‘what’ I might ask participants and ‘how’ I might engage in conversation with them. This questioning was in the mode of not-knowing; of being open to what might be there to hear. Then, during the flow of conversation with participants, the discussion often caused me to question the things I was asking. And I worked to question what the participant’s spoke of rather than leaping ahead, thinking I already knew. At times I became confused and asked further questions to reveal more of what perplexed me. I tried to be my own ‘midwife’ as I laboured for understanding about the ontology of being aged.

## **The Art of Textual Interpretation**

Hermes in Greek mythology was the herald of the Olympian gods, carrying messages and secrets from the gods to the people on earth. He put “into words those mysteries which were beyond the capacity of human utterance” (Jasper, 2004, p. 7). Appropriately, Hermes’ name is used in formulating words which symbolise the illumination and understanding of messages. Thus the Greek word *hermeneia* means an interpreting or revealing that which was previously hidden (Inwood, 1999). And the word *hermeneutik* came to mean, not the interpretation itself but, the “study of interpretation” (Inwood, p. 87). Meanings which are self-evident in a text, therefore, do not call for a hermeneutic engagement. That is, only when a text is saying something which needs to be interpreted and assimilated does hermeneutics find its place (Gadamer, 2004). Historically, the biblical Scriptures provided a rich medium for the art of hermeneutics to flourish.

Prior to Heidegger's seminal work on interpretive phenomenology, two philosophers stand out in the history of contemporary hermeneutics; Frederick Schleiermacher [1768—1834] and Wilhelm Dilthey [1833—1911] (Gadamer, 2004). Schleiermacher is “recognised as the father of modern hermeneutics” (Jasper, 2004, p. 21). He was a German philosopher and theologian who rejected narrow dogmatism and aligned himself with Romaniticism (Thorne & Collocott, 1974). He systemised the art of interpreting the Scriptures. Following on from his work, Dilthey, also a German philosopher, focused on articulating the structures behind human thought, mental life and lived experience (Thorne & Collocott). Dilthey is acknowledged for bringing hermeneutics into the study of methods within the sciences such as philology, the science of language, theology and history (Inwood, 1999).

Heidegger then followed Dilthey's tradition in moving hermeneutics away from solely studying the scriptures toward a generalised way of studying human engagement (Dreyfus, 1991). Furthermore, Dreyfus credits Heidegger with bringing hermeneutics through into contemporary philosophy. This he did by way of his expansive uncovering and interpretation of the essential nature of being. In doing so, the pathway and conditions for conducting any hermeneutic ontological inquiry were set down (Inwood, 1999).

## **Bringing Notions into Language**

Hermeneutics is, above all, concerned with understanding texts. In the context of this study the participants' stories are 'like Hermes.' The stories are the herald. They bear messages within them. Hence, through the research conversations the storied text was delivered to me for interpretation. Hermes was also the god of literature and a patron of poetry (*Hermes*, n.d.). Thus, the philosophical foundations open the way for me to consider diverse forms of literature, including novels and poetry, in coming to understand the meaning of being aged.

Previously, I referred to the rich literary landscape turned to within this study. Here, I discuss the place of poetry and photography. Poems stand out as being unique in their textual nature. Everyday words make up the poetic form, yet

poems are an intensification of everyday language (Gadamer, 2004). In poetry complex understandings are collapsed into few words. Gadamer, therefore, suggests poetry is the “purest reproduction of meaning” (p. 465). Poems are a ‘showing.’ They reveal moods and feelings. They create experiences for the reader (Richardson, 2002). For that reason, poetry demands a hermeneutic experience of the writer. And poetry invites a hermeneutic engagement with the reader. In this way, the reading of poetry is a dialectical conversation. It opens up possibilities for new understandings.

Poetry has a presence in this study. It became a creative, dialectical mode of engaging with my interpretations. Poetic writing was a way of ‘intensifying’ the threads of my understanding. Initially, I attempted to capture each participant’s experience of being aged in a poem. And later I used poetry to distil the essence of my interpretations of the meaning of being aged. Some are brought into this thesis.

Similarly, photographs are a showing. Photographs are a visual text. They speak their own language. They are a ‘saying.’ They reveal something of the photographer’s vantage point. Yet dialectically they go further than this. Photographs invite the viewer to engage in a conversation with the image. The image does not speak for itself. It is the viewer who makes “images speak” (Emmison, 2004, p. 247). Hence, photography also has a place within interpretive research. In this study my photographs of the participant’s hands are an enriching of the spoken and written texts. They show my inherent interest in what people do and the meaning of what they do. Publishing the photographs in this thesis is my way of inviting the viewer into a hermeneutic engagement with the visual text. As seen through my eyes, the images allude to the hidden phenomenon of being aged.

Only image formed keeps the vision.

Yet image formed rests in the poem

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 7).

## To the Thing Itself

Sitting within the philosophical horizon of hermeneutics, phenomenology affords a way of thinking about the phenomenon of being aged. As a field of

inquiry, phenomenology is differentiated from inquiries which seek the explanation of things or to show patterns of association or causation. It is a study of the “forms in which something appears or manifests itself” (King, 2001, p. 109). Thus, phenomenology informs the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of researching something. It is a way of inquiry (Dreyfus, 1991). In Greek the “word *phainomenon* means the manifest, the self-showing” (King, p. 110). It stems from the Greek word meaning “to bring to the light of day, to put in the light” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 51).

The philosophical school of phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl [1859—1938], born in Austria of Jewish origin (Thorne & Collocott, 1974; Walters, 1994). He was a student of mathematics and psychology. And Husserl brought his beliefs in the purity of human logic into his way of phenomenology (Thorne & Collocott). He posited that the essence of being human existed in man’s consciousness and intentionality. Accordingly, humans are subjects in an objectively knowable world (Dreyfus, 1991; Walters, 1994). A mathematical consciousness shows through in Husserl’s conceptualisation of ‘bracketing.’ In his thinking, bracketing is a way of separating one’s existing understandings of things from the process of phenomenological analysis. It is tantamount to the way brackets are used in solving mathematical equations (Walters). The content within the brackets is put to one side; it is dealt with separately. This was Husserl’s way of putting pre-understandings aside in order to understand the thing itself; a way of focusing on the object of inquiry. Thus his ‘transcendental’ phenomenology “was the culmination of the Cartesian tradition, and came to mean the study of phenomena as they appear through the consciousness” (Koch, 1996, p. 175).

Numerous sources cite Husserl as being Heidegger’s teacher however, reportedly, Heidegger did not have personal contact with Husserl until after he completed his doctoral thesis (W. Martin, 2006). While Heidegger was greatly influenced by Husserl’s seminal work in phenomenology, he rejected Husserl’s theory of human consciousness (Dreyfus, 1991). Consequently, three fundamental distinctions are seen in Heidegger’s development of a ‘hermeneutic’ phenomenology. Firstly, he moved away from epistemological questions in order

to open up an ontological understanding of ‘being-in-the-world.’ Secondly, Heidegger rejected the notion that pre-understandings could be bracketed off thereby allowing the inquirer to ‘objectively’ know the phenomenon itself (Walters, 1994). Instead, Heidegger integrated hermeneutic understandings of how historical background and presuppositions are always in play when interpreting things (Dreyfus, 1991; Gadamer, 2004). And thirdly, Heidegger turned his interpretive phenomenology to where he believed the primordial essence of being human dwelled. This was not in consciousness but in the ordinary everyday of human existence (Inwood, 1999).

Colloquially, the term ‘phenomenon’ is often used by researchers to simply mean the object of inquiry. But this usage clouds its essential meaning in ‘phenomenology’ (King, 2001). Phenomenology does not seek to describe a thing which is already self-evident. Phenomenology sets out to bring into the light that which is hidden or concealed; a thing beyond the usual horizon of ‘seeing.’ It is only because the thing itself is concealed that a phenomenological approach is needed (Inwood, 1999). And when something ordinarily lies covered over like this it is typically taken-for-granted. In its concealment, its presence or meaning is not ordinarily questioned (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

Being aged, as the phenomenon of interest in this study, is a thing within. Being aged is covered over by what shows on the outside. In its ordinary, taken-for-granted presence, there is little call to pause and question the meaning of being aged. Hence Heidegger’s phenomenology showed itself as a guide for my pathway through this study.

## **Illuminating the Core Heideggerian Notions**

An ontological view of being is the dwelling place of Heideggerian phenomenology. Three notions fundamental to this study are offered as a foundation to reading this thesis.

### **Dasein**

“Heidegger’s name for human existence is Dasein...a word almost always left in the original German” (Harman, 2007, p. 25). Literally translated it means ‘being-there’ from *da*, ‘there,’ and *sein*, ‘being’ (Harman, 2007; Inwood, 1999;

Wrathall, 2005). In German *dasein* refers to anything which exists, yet Heidegger confines its use in speaking only of human existence. Only humans, he believes, “truly exist in the world, fully open to it” (Harman, p. 3). Therefore, ‘*Dasein*’ signifies the ontology of being human. The notion signifies the unity of existing as human. It gets away from the divisions of body, soul and spirit as well as the thinking that man’s nature exists in a particular faculty such as the capacity for reasoning (Inwood). Sometimes written as *Da-sein*, it emphasises that, as human entities, we always have a ‘there.’ We are always in a context. Essentially, *Dasein* is ‘in the world.’ Accordingly “the ‘there [das Da]’ is the space it opens up and illuminates” (Inwood, p. 42). Hence, Sheehan (2001) brings forward a transliteration of *Dasein* as meaning ‘Being-the open,’ wherein *da* means not ‘the there’ but “the open” (p. 12). ‘Being-the open’ signifies our existence in a state of ‘openness’ within the world, as opposed to a state of ‘thereness’ (Sheehan). In this way, openness is the a priori, the already-there condition of possibility toward different ways of being in the world.

Rather than being in opposition, each interpretation adds to the wholeness of understanding of how the world is available to us to be experienced.

### **Being-in-the-world**

Fundamentally, the human mode of being is grounded a priori in the state Heidegger (1927/1962) calls “Being-in-the-world” (p. 65). ‘A priori’ indicates this state as existing before we can come to think about our being in the world. We are always already there. Thus Heidegger’s use of hyphens in the phrase illustrates the primordial, the ‘from the beginning’ connectedness of humans and the world. It points to *Dasein*’s being “immersed in the world, involved with it, permanently intertwined and occupied with it even when it feels alienated or lonely” (Harman, 2007, p. 61). Being-in-the-world is the pre-condition for moving towards our possible modes of being in our everyday.

### **Essence**

“What something is, as it is, we call its essence or nature” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 17). That is, ‘essence’ is the fundamental character of a thing. It is the a priori “what was to be” (Inwood, 1999, p. 52). Hence, *Dasein*’s essence “lies

in its ‘to be’. Its Being-what-it-is” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 67). Primordially, we are essentially human by way of our potential to understand our being. Our essence is in ‘how’ we are in the world which makes us what we are (King, 2001). From a Heideggerian perspective, “‘to essence’, means to bring something into its essence, where the essence of a thing is what matters to us about it” (Wrathall, 2005, p. 92). It is recognising the fundamental, enduring nature of something. Applied in the context of this study, I aim to throw some light upon the essence of being aged in the everyday. By way of the participants’ stories I explore what makes being aged what it is.

## In the Showing

According to Heidegger (1927/1962), a phenomenon is that which “shows itself from itself” (p. 58). A showing is a bringing of the phenomenon into the light of day. It is a showing of that which usually lies hidden. However, what shows may be ‘from itself’ or it may indicate something which only ‘seems’ to be from itself (Heidegger). In the context of this study, what is brought into the light of day may be a mere ‘appearance;’ an indication of being aged, but not a showing from the phenomenon itself. “Appearing is an *announcing-itself...through something that shows itself*” (Heidegger, p. 53). Wrinkles ‘appearing’ on the skin, for example, are an occurrence of aging but they are not the phenomenon of being aged itself. In this way, wrinkles indicate “something which does *not* show itself” (Heidegger, p. 52). In other words, the phenomenon of being aged remains hidden, yet announces itself through the wrinkles which do show themselves. Thus appearing in the phenomenological sense “is a *not-showing-itself*” (Heidegger, p. 52). So while a phenomenon is never what ‘appears,’ appearing is reliant upon an underlying phenomenon.

A phenomenon may also “show itself as something which in itself it is *not*. When it shows itself in this way, it ‘looks like something or other’” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 51). When this happens, what shows seems to be from the phenomenon itself, but it is not. In such instances, the phenomenon takes on the ‘semblance’ of something else. To explain, someone who is aged and experiences hearing loss may fail to hear what is said in conversation and show confusion.

Being aged ‘seems’ to show itself in the confusion. But the confusion is an announcing of something else; the hearing loss. Hence I remain mindful in this study. That which seems to show may merely be a semblance of what I seek to make manifest; the phenomenon of being aged.

Given these understandings of phenomena, ‘phenomenology’ is the field of inquiry which lets “that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself”(Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 58). So rather than consider what appears through human consciousness as Husserl did, Heidegger’s gaze turns in a different way to the thing itself. The thing which lies hidden is not the entity or object itself but the ‘being’ of that entity. It is a questioning of the thing that essentially makes the phenomenon what it is. Hence, Heidegger’s phenomenology is an ontological inquiry. *Being and Time* (Heidegger) illustrates the ‘how’ of phenomenology through an uncovering of the ‘being’ of being human. In my journey through this study, *Being and Time*’s ontological pathway and conditions are my guide. They point the way to my coming to understand ‘what’ being aged essentially is.

## A Science of Phenomena

When thought’s courage stems from  
the bidding of Being, then  
destiny’s language thrives.

As soon as we have the thing before  
our eyes, and in our hearts an ear  
for the word, thinking prospers

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 5).

A look at the word phenomenology shows it has two parts; ‘phenomenon’ and ‘-ology’ from the stem ‘logos’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Grasping the meaning of ‘logos’ is in itself illuminating. Logos is Greek meaning “word, speech, [or] reason” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 689). Consequently, the suffix ‘logy’ is used to designate the “names of sciences and departments of knowledge, and nouns denoting modes of speaking; as [with] *eulogy, tautology*” (Hayward &

Sparkes, p. 689). In phenomenology, Heidegger draws on Aristotle's interpretation of 'speech' as meaning "to make manifest what one is 'talking about' in one's discourse....The logos lets something be seen" (p. 56). This understanding reveals the fundamental congruence between 'phenomenon' and 'logos.' It shows phenomenology's congruence with hermeneutics. It shows the congruence of letting something of the phenomenon be seen through language.

Furthermore, if what is 'seen' in discourse is "always harking back to something else...it lets something be seen as something" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 57). In language, the 'harking back' is akin to the 'appearing' of a phenomenon. The harking back is an announcing of something which is not said. It points to a meaning which remains hidden. In this way there is the possibility of speech covering over that which might be heard. Heidegger calls this the "existential-hermeneutical 'as'" (p. 201). It is when the talk asserts one 'as' whereas an interpretation of the discourse reveals a primordial 'as.' To illustrate, in a recent conversation with my mother she told me about her last bridge gathering. Her bridge friends are women she has known for many years. Again she returned to an oft spoken comment; the 'need' to play bridge. In the talk, playing bridge was spoken of 'as' a social gathering. Yet existentially, for my mother, bridge is first and foremost 'as' exercising thinking. Accordingly, my interpreting the textual stories within this study is a going beyond the spoken words. It is, in part, a listening for the showing of something as something else.

### **A Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

The meaning of Heidegger's (1927/1962) phenomenology lies within its interpretive method. It is here that Heidegger's philosophical link to hermeneutics becomes evident. As an interpretive phenomenology, hermeneutics is philosophically first in order. Hermeneutics brings an interpretive way of working with the research text and phenomenological descriptions (Dreyfus, 1991; Inwood, 1999). Within this paradigm, the textual language is understood as being a cogent messenger of meanings. Language alludes to what lies hidden in a text. Thus to be engaged in interpretive phenomenology means a grasping of things "in such a way that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated

by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly" (Heidegger, p. 59). Interpretive phenomenology calls for a thoughtful effort in order to go beyond one's already held understandings (J. Diekelmann, 2005). It is a 'way and a weighing.'

For this study, I understood elders' conversations about everyday events to be the fertile ground of my phenomenological inquiry. Guided by this assumption, the research text was gathered by way of in-depth conversations with people who were aged. It was here, in the conversational text, that the hidden phenomenon of being aged had an opportunity to show itself from itself. This centrality of hermeneutics in Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology is the reason I turned to Gadamer (2004) for closer guidance in the 'how' of the interpretive method.

## **How is Understanding Possible?**

Hermeneutics denotes a particular way of coming to understand through language. As previously described, the task of hermeneutics is one of "entering into dialogue with the text" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 362). It is a way of engaging with text. As such, hermeneutics is not reducible to a list of techniques or strategies. "Interpretive thinking is a proceeding rather than a procedure" (J. Diekelmann, 2005, p. 5). Yet a fundamental philosophic question must still be asked. That is "how is understanding possible" (Gadamer, p. xxvii)? Gadamer sets about answering this question in *Truth and Method* through his 'theory of the hermeneutic experience.' He offers rich descriptions of the hermeneutic conditions which move the inquirer towards and through the interpretive engagement. And he provides ontological descriptions of how it is to be in dialogue with a text.

While I describe the fundamental conditions somewhat separately, they entwine together in the play of the hermeneutic engagement. They come together as the enquirer experiences interpretive thinking. Following a brief description of each condition, I uncover something of how I engaged in the hermeneutical task within this study.

### **Illuminating the 'Historicity' of Understanding**

The oldest of the old follow behind

us in our thinking and yet it  
comes to meet us

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 10).

By virtue of what has gone before and our experiences in the world we are always already affected by our history; it ‘comes to meet us.’ Our history is who we are (Gadamer, 2004). In other words, we are the effect of our historically acquired, traditional knowledge even when we are not aware of it. And from what has gone before, we acquire ‘habits of thinking’ (Gadamer). Accordingly, our ‘historicity’ governs what matters to us and the questions we think to raise in relation to things. Yet hermeneutics necessitates an openness and a readiness to be guided by the text. ‘Openness’ is the milieu which lets textual meanings be disclosed. Gadamer points out the importance of bringing our prejudices, our prepossessed understandings, into the light. Thus a central condition for the hermeneutic experience is a striving to understand the self more fully in order to appropriate one’s own historicity and prejudices (Gadamer). This ‘stepping back’ at the beginning of the hermeneutical engagement is preparatory for thinking beyond what might otherwise appear as simple or obvious (J. Diekelmann, 2005).

Consistent with recognising it is neither desirable nor possible to ‘bracket off’ pre-understandings, Gadamer (2004) suggests our presuppositions remain in play. And new prejudices will emerge through the interpretive process. Hence being in the hermeneutic engagement means a continual readiness to be open to, and to elucidate, how presuppositions may be influencing thinking.

Prior to the first research conversation, a supervisor engaged me in a dialectical process of elucidating my presuppositions. The moment just presented itself. I had not anticipated that moment was to become my ‘self-interview’ (Richardson, 2002). I had not already thought about what I might say. I suddenly found myself engaging with the questions asked of me. I was invited to think about why I was drawn to the topic of being aged, the understandings I already held and my experiences with people who were aged. Our conversation was audio taped and transcribed. Listening and re-listening to my words helped illuminate my prejudices early in the research journey. The essence of my historicity of

understanding is laid out in the introduction as I speak of my ‘moving towards the study’ and of ‘what drew me to this study.’

Yet I also held on to the understanding that illuminating my historicity and presuppositions was not, and could never be, a complete revealing of them. Accordingly I worked to remain attentive to hearing when my own understandings presented themselves in my conversations with participants and with the text. In the methods section, I give examples of elucidating and working with my presuppositions in the play of the research itself.

### **Apprehending Horizons of Understanding**

The uncovering of traditional understandings and prejudices permits an apprehension of the ‘hermeneutical situation’ (Gadamer, 2004). That is, the interpreter is able to frame his or her own standpoint. Gadamer calls this apprehending one’s ‘horizon of understanding.’ It enables the interpreter to ‘see’ what is close and more readily brought into focus. And it allows a gazing outward to a far field of vision. This gazing out towards the distant horizon is not a turning away from the phenomenon of interest but a way of seeing it “within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (Gadamer, p. 304). So, importantly, the horizon of understanding is not a fixed stand point. “The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us” (Gadamer, p. 303). Our horizon shifts as understanding unfolds.

Ontologically, the interpreter experiences a tension when textual meanings appear as being distant from one’s present horizon. It is in this tension that our presuppositions are challenged. And it is through the tension that the horizon of understanding has a rich potential to be altered. Gadamer’s (2004) name for this ‘altering’ is the ‘fusion of horizons.’ In the fusion, textual meanings are taken on as one’s own understandings. “*Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons*” (Gadamer, p. 305). Such is the nature of the hermeneutic conversation. It “lets what is outside of a given point of view merge with it in order to generate a new one” (J. Diekelmann, 2005, p. 23). In particular, movement and fusion of the past and present horizons occurs through being in the ‘hermeneutic circle.’

In this study I played a part in co-creating the text. The research text is a product of my partnership with the fifteen participants. For example, apprehending my hermeneutical situation showed I had a limited view of what it was to be aged. From this came one of the questions I raised with each participant; ‘When are you old?’ What came out in conversation emerged from their understanding of my question. Hence the interpretations which are brought forward in the findings chapters are a fusion of understandings; theirs with mine and mine with theirs. The interpretive words then become my words and not necessarily those spoken by the participants. A broadening of my horizon of understanding was facilitated by my periodically standing back and looking outwards, away from the text itself. I took time to ask “what seems to be coming through?” and “how do I know this?” Creating and recreating a map of understandings helped my moving to new horizons.

### **Being in the Hermeneutic Circle**

In coming to understand a text, the interpreter “is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 269). This means the self-disclosure of presuppositions is an ever-present task of the interpretive engagement. In working to understand what is there in the text the interpreter must be continually clarifying ‘fore-projections’ that emerge. Heidegger (1927/1962) describes this attentiveness to presuppositions and expectations as being the “first, last and constant task” (p. 195). So instead of presuppositions and fore-projections hindering one’s openness to the text, they are a condition of understanding. This ongoing motion of replacing existing fore-conceptions with new ones “constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation” (Gadamer, p. 269).

When engaging in the text in this way, the interpreter is ontologically in the ‘hermeneutic circle’ of understanding. It is a being in the mode of interpretive thinking (J. Diekelmann, 2005).

To be a thinking researcher is to open oneself to being lost, taking paths that go nowhere, circling again and again, having the wisdom to pursue feelings and the courage to expose tentative thoughts to critique. It is to

struggle and wrestle, and then to walk away trusting that insight will come. (Smythe, 2005, p. 256)

Being in the hermeneutic circle means being receptive to the text's speaking. It lets the text speak in its own way. Being in the hermeneutic circle is a being questioned by the text and questioning it to uncover answers. This mode of dialectical conversation lets the text's 'truth' be seen (Gadamer, 2004).

Additionally, pre-Heideggerian understandings of the hermeneutic circle see it as being the interpretive interplay between the parts and the whole of the text. In this circular relationship understanding parts of the text opens a fuller understanding of the whole of it. And a richer understanding of the whole text, in return, enables a focused understanding of its parts (Inwood, 1999). When an interpretive harmony is gained in this way it brings a richer understanding of what lies in the text (Gadamer). This is the 'hallmark' of the science of hermeneutics.

At a pragmatic level, the circular relationship between the parts and the whole shows within this study in two ways. Firstly, the anecdotes which emerged within each research conversation made up each participant's 'whole' story. And secondly, all together, the stories drawn from the conversations made up the whole of the research text. Enabling my interpretive movement between these parts and the whole was facilitated in multiple ways. Questions and answers came from writing interpretively about each participant's stories, engaging in regular doctoral supervision and writing about my thinking and new questions in a reflective journal. And my task was not to stay with each participant's subjective experiences of being in their everyday, but to question how the phenomenon of being aged might be showing in its universal forms.

We never come to thoughts. They come  
to us.

That is the proper hour of discourse

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 6).

This dwelling with the whole text was an erratic pathway. I gave myself over to 'being lost;' to writing about my thinking until the thinking came; to 'circling again and again;' finding it hard to 'walk away.' Yet to my constant

amazement my confusion often cleared into a richer understanding. ‘Seeing the clearing’ often awoke me; drawing me out of my bed to be written down. And I frequently stumbled into the clearing as I jogged ‘unthinkingly’ along my cliff top run in the early morning; urging me to get home and write. The thoughts came to me when they were ready.

### **Being Open to Not Knowing**

Maintaining an orientation to being open is the condition which enables the dialectical, hermeneutic conversation with a text. Holding on to prejudices closes down the possibilities for knowing, while artful questioning reaches into the realm of the open (Gadamer, 2004). “To question means to lay open, to place in the open” (Gadamer, p. 361). Thus an openness to ‘not knowing’ generates a condition of spaciousness in which questions can come forth from the text. In the space of not knowing questions can suddenly burst into the open and present themselves to the text’s interpreter. In the open “a question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion” (Gadamer, p. 360). Yet always the questioner must be guided by the textual content and intent. Thus the hermeneutic conversation is facilitated by a genuine concern for ‘hearing’ what lies within the text. Being in the not-knowing space is therefore an uninterrupted listening. Still the questioning is not infinite in its range; it is limited by the interpreter’s historicity and moving horizon of vision.

In attempting to open up the ‘not-knowing’ space, I worked to ask ‘open’ questions like “tell me about yesterday.” And I tried to question further using the participant’s words as in “tell me about ‘being left behind.’” And I started noticing when questions I could never have considered before suddenly pressed themselves upon me. Sometimes this happened during the research conversations and sometimes in my later dwelling with the text. I vividly recall my first experience of this phenomenon. It happened amid Frank’s story about being 97 and a half. Along the way he mentioned not having ‘time to get old.’ For some moments his voice receded into the background. I could only hear the question which kept voicing itself to me; “how is it that 97 years of age is not old?” I felt myself being forced into the textual spaciousness.

### **Going Beyond the Words**

What is spoken is never, and in no  
language, what is said

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 11).

Understanding unfolds but essentially, in the hermeneutic conversation, the interpreter must go beyond simply reconstructing the text. “Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 296). Hence the interpretive movement is a questioning of that which projects behind the words. Understanding is not forced but occurs “when something addresses us” (Gadamer, p. 298). Something in the text speaks. The understandings thus produced are neither the text’s nor the interpreter’s but a new horizon of understanding through which the meanings are brought to light. “When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us” (Gadamer, p. 484).

My own experiences of being captivated by the text often began in conversation with participants, but mostly my interests were drawn and held as I dwelled with the transcripts. I noticed how things were spoken about; how the participants found language to ‘say’ what they meant. And I listened for things which might be showing something as something else; the hermeneutic ‘as.’ The words themselves became my ‘way and weighing’ and my ‘stiles and saying.’ Hence, what is unveiled in the findings chapters reveals what came from going beyond the words themselves.

### **Being Always on the Way**

Within the hermeneutic situation our historicity and finiteness in questioning means “the discovery of the true meaning of a text ...is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 298). Hence a condition of being in the hermeneutic engagement is accepting one is always on the way; never done. Yet this is not a deficiency of hermeneutics; being always on the way is a central feature of the interpretive method. And here, going back to the word’s roots brings a thinking of ‘method,’ not just as a way of doing of research

but a meaning of ‘being on the way.’ Method as a notion comes from the Greek word *methodos* (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 728). ‘Meta’ means “‘from here to there,’ ‘toward something’” (J. Diekelmann, 2005, p. 6) and ‘hodos’ means ‘way’ (Hayward & Sparkes). When something is on the way it is not necessary to identify a fixed starting point or a definitive end (J. Diekelmann).

Thinking about the hermeneutic engagement as ‘being always on the way’ aligns with Heidegger’s (1927/1962) phenomenology. In letting something be seen from itself, it is never revealed in its completeness. We only ever come closer to illuminating the phenomenon of interest. We are always on the way to understanding.

All our heart’s courage is the  
echoing response to the  
first call of Being which  
gathers our thinking into the  
play of the world.

In thinking all things  
become solitary and slow.

Patience nurtures magnanimity.

He who thinks greatly must  
err greatly

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 9).

Accordingly, the end of my research journey is not the end of the pathway toward understanding the meaning of being aged. It is not an arriving at understanding’s end. Where I finish is contextually and temporally determined. The finish is instead a beginning. The finish opens up new questions and new possibilities.

## **Heidegger’s History and its Implications**

“Should Heidegger’s philosophy turn out to be [politically]  
implicated...then some or all of that philosophy, itself, is open to serious,  
perhaps fatal, criticism” (Young, 1997, p. 52).

In walking the research pathway, one troubling matter needs to be dealt with. I chose Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology to guide this study for scholarly reasons. Yet it seems I could not choose to ignore the historical and contemporary discourses related to Heidegger the man or, more particularly, Heidegger the National Socialist Party member. Rather than time quietening the talk, the publication of several biographical books since the late 1980s has thrown concerns more overtly into the public arena (Wolin, 1993a). The presence of many voices in the discussion suggests an international struggle to either unveil or reconcile how a great philosopher seemingly got it so wrong.

In my quest to understand, I turned to a range of contemporary interpretations of Heidegger's work (Dreyfus, 1991; Guignon, 1993; Inwood, 1999; King, 2001; Wrathall, 2005). I also uncovered several texts which specifically address the matter of his involvement with Nazism (B. Lang, 1996; Safranski, 1998; Wolin, 1993b; Young, 1997). Each of these works ponders some of the profound questions related to Heidegger's philosophical and political sentiments.

But before I became entangled in the massive web of sometimes conflicting information and opinions, I stopped and considered why I needed to delve into this historical world. Fundamentally, I felt compelled to consider how Heidegger's political partisanship might cause me concern. More particularly, I needed to mull over any implications it might hold for the integrity of this study. Firstly I summarise Heidegger's historical situation before asking two questions.

### **The Situation**

Heidegger grew up and began his philosophical career in a period of anti-modernism and anti-liberalism in Germany. Contextually, these sentiments prevailed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century through to the 1930s when Hitler came to power (Guignon, 1993). The young philosopher's seminal work *Being and Time* was written during an era when "pre-Nazi Germany was exposed in rapid succession to a demoralising defeat in world war, an exacting peace treaty, catastrophic inflation, political chaos, and a severe economic depression" (Wolin, 1993a, pp. 16-17). The opening was there for new leadership and new beginnings.

Heidegger himself was a devout anti-modernist and believed that the National Socialist conservatism, at least in its early form, held the potential for a spiritual and cultural renaissance of the German people (Wolin, 1993a).

In 1928 the young Heidegger succeeded Husserl as professor at the University of Freiburg; just four years before Hitler was appointed as the German Chancellor (Guignon, 1993). Then, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1933, soon after Heidegger's appointment as rector of the University, he "joined the National Socialist German Workers Party" (Guignon, p. 85); a membership he apparently retained until 1945 (Wolin, 1993a). When I consider the social context and mood of the time, the ambitious young philosopher in the powerful role as university rector may have simply wanted to bolster his own career. Or perhaps he feared the consequences if he did otherwise. But by all accounts Heidegger believed in the Party's vision for Germany's re-awakening. It is said he also held aspirations of being philosophical advisor to Hitler (Wolin, 1993a). But importantly, there is no indication that Heidegger promoted the Nazi worldview which culminated in despicable crimes against humanity (Safranski, 1998; Wolin, 1993a).

During his year as rector Heidegger was apparently enthusiastic in introducing Nazi anti-Semitic principles and being an outspoken propagandist (Guignon, 1993; Wolin, 1993a). And it seems he acted ruthlessly as a 'Nazi informer' against several of his colleagues (Guignon). However from the mid-1930s Heidegger was more silent and distanced himself from the Nazi regime's politics and barbaric practices (Guignon, 1993; B. Lang, 1996; Wolin, 1993a). Nonetheless, it is "fairly clear that, to the end of his days, Heidegger never abandoned his faith in the movement's authentic historical potential, its 'inner truth and greatness'" (Wolin, 1993a, p. 6). For his political crimes as a Nazi collaborator, the 1945 denazification committee expelled Heidegger from all university activities for five years.

So although Heidegger wrote an apology to the committee for his political errors, "his refusal to come forth with an unambiguous public disavowal of his earlier political ties, moreover, has been a source of great irritation and dismay, even among those seeking to defend his legacy" (Wolin, 1993a, p. 6). But silence

is, for Heidegger, a mode of speech. “Anyone who keeps silent when he wants to give us to understand something, must ‘have something to say’” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 342). Thus Heidegger’s reticence in denouncing his political affiliation perhaps says more than spoken words might have. Lang (1996), an American Jew, interprets the silence as a “deliberate—thoughtful—affirmation on his part....[showing] a connection in Heidegger between the domains of the political and the philosophical” (pp. 5-6).

So, how did Heidegger’s situation come to this? Did it simply show human fallibility, or political naiveté, or was it more sinister than this? Heidegger’s view was “he had, for a short while, committed himself to the National Socialist revolution because he had regarded it as a metaphysical revolution. When it failed to live up to its promises...he had withdrawn and pursued his philosophical work” (Safranski, 1998, pp. 337-338). And so Heidegger publicly disentangled himself from the Party’s politics and its failed revolution. In his silence, Heidegger let the truth be (Inwood, 1999).

### **Is ‘*Being and Time*’ Politically Informed?**

Numerous critics have attempted to implicate *Being and Time* as being imbued with Nazism. Commonly he is accused of ‘causal responsibility’ whereby detractors seek “to demonstrate that in *Being and Time* Heidegger worked out a philosophy which demanded a certain kind of political order” (Young, 1997, p. 52). Supposedly, he later saw it as being played out in Nazism. However, Young argues that philosophically *Being and Time* merely opens up an ontological meaning of being. And historically, Heidegger’s conservative, anti-modernist beliefs pre-date his writing of *Being and Time*. Therefore the idea that this work conceals fascist sentiments is discounted as patently incorrect (Young).

Other critics put forward the ‘positive implication’ argument. This reasons that the words Heidegger used in *Being and Time*, such as “‘Volk’ [people], ‘destiny’, ‘resolve’ and ‘historical’ (as in ‘historical spiritual-mission of the Volk’) play a central role in Heidegger’s political utterances during 1933-4” (Young, 1997, p. 55). The implication being that Heidegger’s political beliefs are already evident in his ontological writings from 1927. But this word association does not

mean Heidegger's philosophy embodies fascism. Safranski (1998) argues that Heidegger's "movements on the political stage [were] those of a philosophical dreamer" (p. 234). As I interpret it, from 1933 to 1934 Heidegger was drawn toward the possibility of a German metaphysical revolution. It is highly feasible he acted for his own sake and neglected to concern himself with the unfolding crisis of humanism.

Further criticisms suggest *Being and Time*'s connection to Nazism is 'negatively implicated.' In other words, it is blameworthy by its failure to embody the grounds for rejecting fascism (Young, 1997). Here Heidegger's detractors argue that his ontology is empty of moral guidance. However, simply because an 'ideal existence' is not described in the text it does not mean Heidegger dismisses its importance (Young). My thoughts are that *Being and Time* does not set out to propose a way of moral reasoning, or to describe what makes a 'good' person as Aristotle had done.

Dreyfus (1991) ponders whether particular sentences in the text point to a philosophical justification for Heidegger's later political partisanship. But he concludes that nothing in *Being and Time* advocates for, or against, human sacrifice for a national cause. Based on my reading of Heidegger's situation and my thinking about the arguments put forward, I concur with the view that "in *Being and Time* Heidegger consciously and deliberately philosophizes around 'everydayness'—there is nothing in it about nation and state, about race, or any of the values of National Socialist ideology" (Safranski, 1998, p. 268).

While I recognise there will always be proponents vigorously arguing an opposite view, I am persuaded that *Being and Time* is genuine in its metaphysical, ontological endeavour. Thus, I do not see Heidegger's philosophical thinking as being politically informed. But this still leaves me with one question.

### **Could My Study be Discredited?**

I pondered whether this study could be discredited through having its philosophical foundations informed by Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology. Across the diverse readings I have undertaken, none suggested Heidegger was not a great thinker, even when criticising his work itself. Nonetheless, my belief in the

philosophical integrity of *Being and Time* does not mean I condone Heidegger's political entanglement with the National Socialist Party or his later silence.

This brings me to the conclusion that any discrediting of this study should come from my own failings in interpreting the philosophy and not from the philosophy itself. It means I move forward with a confidence in Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology. My 'way and weighing' continue.

## A Reflection

This chapter set out to show the philosophies underpinning this study. Interpretive phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate guide for exploring how elders experience aging in their everyday lives. As interpretive phenomenology is not in itself a research methodology, I aimed to illuminate how the writings of Heidegger and Gadamer guided the decisions I made along the way. Hermeneutics is the art of textual interpretation and provided the overarching philosophical understandings. Within this view, Gadamer's conditions for the hermeneutic engagement are presented as informing my way of working with the spoken, the written, the photographic and the interpretive texts generated. Heideggerian phenomenology brought an ontological focus on the meaning of 'being.' It guided my understanding of 'being aged' as a phenomenon which is ordinarily covered over and therefore taken-for-granted. And it kept me grounded in matters of the everyday in advanced age. Overall, the philosophical underpinnings informed my thinking about the 'why' and the 'how' of seeking to understand the meaning of being aged. They 'showed' the way in the absence of methodological signposts. They lead me to understand that where I would get to would always be on the way to understanding and not a complete revealing of the complex phenomenon of being aged. The understandings presented lead into the following chapter which offers a description of how I went about the research itself.

WHAT, I ask, is the meaning of being aged?

But HOW can I come to understanding?

The answer (yet not THE ANSWER)  
 is in the philosophical gaze.  
 Showing ways of thinking,  
 bringing a practical wisdom,  
 illuminating the solitary pathway,  
 pointing the way.

Engaging in the hermeneutical task,  
 the spoken stories as the herald.  
 Hearing the messages [and secrets] in the text,  
 letting the words speak,  
 listening uninterrupted to the silences,  
 feeling questions come—asking questions,  
 being in the slowness of thinking.

Looking inward, bringing the past forward and  
 holding it there, not bracketing,  
 seeing the near horizon and peering into the mist.  
 Stepping—stumbling—not knowing  
 standing back—turning away—feeling the spaciousness.  
 In the motion, understanding melts down and reforms.

Gaping in wonderment toward the phenomenon,  
 to the thing itself, the thing which is  
 covered over—concealed—veiled in the taken-for-granted.  
 Wondering; is what appears a not-showing of it?  
 Pondering; is the showing something it is not?  
 Letting the thing show itself yet never in its completeness,  
 ALWAYS only ever ON THE WAY.

## Chapter Four: Being on the Way

“The bridge....does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream....The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 150).

The study’s design is the ‘bridge.’ Constructing it was not solely for the purpose of getting from one bank to another; of getting ‘from here to there.’ Always I had in mind the study’s purpose of ‘gathering;’ of arranging things in order to open up the flow of the meaning of being aged. This chapter describes the building of this study. It shows how the philosophical underpinnings emerged as ‘banks’ as the thinking flowed through into the way of this study.

Interpretive phenomenology is not in itself a research method (Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1927/1962). It calls for a “lived phronesis, the wisdom-in-action that knows in the moment, and finds the way day by day” (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008, p. 1390). As such, there is not one way to follow. And there are few tangible guides as to how to go about being in the hermeneutic phenomenological encounter (Caelli, 2001). Thus, I ventured out trusting that the pathway would show itself to me. The way evolved through the research engagement. By showing the methodical steps I took I do not mean to suggest the way forward was structured and linear. Rather, I do so in order to uncover the thoughtfulness and scholarliness of my approach (N. Diekelmann, 2001). Some sections describe procedural matters and some are a showing of how it was to be in-the-play of being on the way.

### Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was granted by the Northern X Regional Ethics Committee in August 2005 (Appendix II). Subsequently in March 2006 the

Committee granted permission for taking digital photographs of only the participant's hands (Appendix III).

Integral to this study, collaborative agreements were signed with two community partners. Te Puna Hauora O Te Raki Paewhenua (Te Puna Hauora), a local Maori community health and social service, agreed to consult on the cultural relevance to elder Maori, to assist with the recruitment of Maori elders and to guide textual interpretations (Appendix IV). Similarly Age Concern North Shore Incorporated agreed to provide an interview space and to assist in recruitment of non-Maori elders if required (Appendix V).

Beyond my commitment of adhering to the ethical conditions for research on 'human subjects,' I felt a deep moral responsibility for what I was embarking on. I would be inviting 'strangers' to venture out into the unknown with me. I felt an importance for each participant to experience the journey as respectful and valuable. I wanted to offer something to the person and not simply serve the study's purpose.

## **Identifying Potential Participants**

The purposive selection of participants was informed by the nature of the research question as well as the philosophical conditions. My aim to gather rich stories of everyday experiences in advanced age meant I sought to recruit men and women who were 'aged.' Accordingly, I aimed to identify non-Maori elders aged 80 years or older, and up to 5 Maori aged 70 years or older. This ten-year discrepancy in entry age was based on the disparity in average longevity between Maori and non-Maori (Crothers, 2003). And I sought participants who were living in a private residence within the North Shore community. To enable this, the general electoral roll was selected as a suitable means of identifying potential participants.

Recruiting by way of the general electoral roll posed two restrictions. Those not registered with the electoral office, and Maori who were only registered on the Maori electoral roll, would be excluded. However, these restrictions were not considered to be limitations within the philosophical paradigm. Given ethics approval, the New Zealand Electoral Enrolment Centre released the requested data

from the Health Research information base. The data covered all registered electors aged 70 and older with a residential address within the North Shore local authority. It was reported in 12 month age bands for electors born between 1 October 1900 and 30 September 1935. It detailed electors' names, ethnicity as Maori or non-Maori as well as residential and mailing addresses.

'A priori' criteria were used in identifying potential participants from the report (Warren, 2002). The criteria encompassed variations of age, gender, type of residential dwelling and whether the elder lived alone or not. My presupposition was that the experience of being aged may be influenced by circumstance and lived context. 'Universal forms' of being aged may, therefore, be more likely to be uncovered through a diversity of stories. I aimed to recruit participants across the age range, with an emphasis on those of more advanced age. As gender was not reported, I used the person's title or given names as an indicator. And as a signifier of different living circumstances I considered address types such as those showing only a street number, suggesting a stand-alone home, as well as those showing a unit or apartment number. In addition, a listing of two or more people with the same family name and the same residential address was used as a potential sign of 'living with' someone. To further enhance diversity, I included addresses within communities which showed both higher and lower than average levels of education, employment, income and European ethnicity as reported in the North Shore City Community Profile (Statistics New Zealand, 2003). Beyond this, I assumed differences would present themselves by virtue of selecting from a database which represented a socially diverse geographic area.

My selection of potential participants excluded electors for whom the residential address was given as a care facility. And I excluded those for whom the contact name and address were different from the person's residential address. For the latter, I assumed a family member may be acting on the elder's behalf, meaning the person may not be in a position to freely consent. Although the study was not designed to be initiated in a general election year, this was the case. I believe the currency of the data contributed to the success of employing the electoral roll as a means of purposively selecting people living in advanced age within in the community.

## **Recruiting Elders for the Study**

Fifteen elders participated in this study, eleven non-Maori and four Maori. Eight were women aged between 77 and 95 years, and seven were men aged between 71 and 97. The final number of participants evolved as a consequence of the ongoing interpretive process, rather than being pre-determined from the outset. A method of ‘rolling’ recruitment was used to avoid over-enrolment of participants. Additionally, recruitment was planned to be conducted over a protracted period in order to allow time for my immersion in each participant’s stories. To enhance the cultural relevance of the research methods, recruitment differed for Maori and non-Maori. Hence, the methods are described separately.

### **Non-Maori Participants**

Through a series of four mail-outs potential non-Maori participants were sent information about the study. Each personally addressed letter contained an Information Sheet (Appendix VI), a consent form (Appendix VII), and a reply-addressed, pre-stamped envelope. Wenger (2002) suggests elders, or those acting on their behalf, find it easier to decline participation when an approach is made by letter. As it was important the participants were willing volunteers, no follow-up contact was initiated. Although the study’s trustworthiness is not influenced by the participant response rate, the details are given as a means of fully documenting the process.

In the first mail-out in October 2005, fourteen elders born between 1904 and 1925 were sent information on the study. Of these, two agreed to participate, five declined and seven did not respond. As became a pattern, I often received phone calls from the person, or their daughter or son, declining their participation. Wenger (2002) reports that relatives commonly act to avoid recruitment of older family members, particularly if they are ‘frail.’ Sometimes the conversations were quite lengthy as the caller shared information about current circumstances. Importantly, they were not asked to give a reason for declining and I deeply appreciated their efforts in making direct contact with me.

The second mail-out was to twelve elders born between 1904 and 1911. One person consented to participate and three declined. No response was received

from the remaining eight people. The proximity to Christmas may have influenced the low number of replies. Twenty elders, born between 1906 and 1916, were included in the third mail-out. Of these, five agreed to participate, four declined, and no response was received from eleven people. In the fourth mail-out to eight elders, born between 1907 and 1916, one agreed to participate, two declined and five did not respond.

On receiving each consent form, phone contact was made in order to arrange the day and time for meeting. All participants consented to the research conversations being conducted in their own homes. They were given the choice of having a support person present. However, only one of the non-Maori participants chose to have a friend present throughout the research conversation.

By the end of June 2006 I had gathered everyday stories from five men and four women. Informed by my initial interpretation of the text, I sought to recruit several more women who lived with a spouse or family member. Because the electoral roll reports did not provide this information, Age Concern North Shore chose to assist by placing a notice in its newsletter to members. It emphasised the call for further women participants. Ten women and three men aged 83 to 94 responded. Each was sent the information about the study and consent form. Subsequently, two women were purposively selected; one was recently widowed and the other lived with a daughter. As a way of respectfully managing the remaining volunteers, I contacted each one to explain that, given the high level of interest in the study, I now had more volunteers than I could involve. All agreed I could contact them again if I needed further participants. This did not eventuate. These volunteers voiced an enthusiasm for the study and thought they had something to offer because of their advanced age.

### **Maori Participants**

Recruitment of Maori participants began after I had completed an initial interpretation of the non-Maori elders' stories. The partnership with Te Puna Hauora brought knowledge of Maori kaupapa<sup>10</sup> and a familiarity of the local

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<sup>10</sup> Kaupapa means a “plan, principle, [or] philosophy” (Walker, 1990, p. 296).

Maori community into the recruitment process. In particular, the Kaumatua appointed to the organisation was my day-to-day research partner. One at a time, he purposively identified Maori elders who met the inclusion criteria. During a visit with the whanau<sup>11</sup> he would mention the study and its purpose. If interest was expressed, the Kaumatua left the written information sheet and consent form for consideration. When the elder indicated agreement to participate the Kaumatua collected the consent form during his next visit. He would then advise me of an elder joining the study. Whilst none of the participants asked to converse in Maori, the Kaumatua was prepared to lead the conversations in Maori or to translate as indicated.

For the research conversation with the first Maori participant, the Kaumatua was present throughout our time together. But the talk did not reach a conversational flow. I found myself asking more questions as a way of trying to open the dialogue up. Yet a few days later when I returned the draft stories, he chatted freely about many things for nearly two hours. With the Kaumatua's guidance I reflected on what happened. My being unknown to the elder and not initially making time for first gaining his trust seemed to be at the heart of why things happened as they did. We changed the process for the next three participants with the aim of opening up the space for beginning to come to 'know' each other. Subsequently, my first introduction would be with the Kaumatua as he 'dropped in' to the family home. It would be a time of simply 'gathering' over a cup of tea; of talking about whatever came up. When the Kaumatua thought it was timely, he would suggest the arrangement be made for the research conversation. Initially I felt uncomfortable just dropping in but this is how it was. This was how the Kaumatua was with the elders in his community. In my being with, watching, listening and reflecting I learned to be 'the researcher' in a different way. And I learned to go with the Kaumatua being ready for any possibilities to open up.

Between July and November 2006, I completed research conversations with four Maori elders, two men and two women. Contextual openness was a hallmark of the talking. The kitchen table was where talk happened; other whanau

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<sup>11</sup> Whanau means family or extended family (Walker, 1990).

were almost always present and the movement of everyday home life continued around us. We conversed in the hub of the family home. What was spoken by one was open for all to hear.

## Profile of Participants

	Pseudonym	Age	Recruitment	Living Circumstances	Type of Dwelling
1	<b>Madge</b>	95	Electoral Roll	Widow, living alone 2 years	Unit, retirement village, 3 yrs
2	<b>Margaret</b>	80	Electoral Roll	Married, living with husband	Family home, 52 years
3	<b>Frank</b>	97	Electoral Roll	Widower, living alone, 8 years	Family home, 12 years
4	<b>Clark</b>	89	Electoral Roll	Widower, living alone, 5 years	Family home, 17 years
5	<b>Christina</b>	93	Electoral Roll	Widow, living alone, 10 years	Family home, 30 years
6	<b>Curly</b>	97	Electoral Roll	Widower 3yrs, living with daughter & husband	Joint home, downstairs unit, 13 years
7	<b>Ferguson</b>	97	Electoral Roll	Widower, living alone 30 yrs, supported	Family home, 38 years
8	<b>Tom</b>	91	Electoral Roll	Married, living with wife, he is main carer	Family home, 56 years
9	<b>Merrill</b>	89	Age Concern	Widow, 25 years, daughter lives at home	Family home, 66 years
10	<b>Mary</b>	91	Age Concern	Widow, 18 months, living alone	Family home, 31 years
11	<b>Florence</b>	90	Electoral Roll	Married, living with husband	New apartment, 3 years
12	<b>Matelot</b>	74	Kaumatua	Married, living with wife	Family home, 48 years
13	<b>Ella</b>	93	Kaumatua	Widow, living with daughter	Private home, downstairs unit, renting
14	<b>Pani</b>	71	Kaumatua	Married, living with wife	Housing NZ home, renting
15	<b>May</b>	77	Kaumatua	Married, living with husband	Housing NZ home, renting

## Gathering the Text

“The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression” (van Manen, 2001, p. 36).

This study’s research text was gathered by way of in-depth, individual research conversations. Philosophically, I understood the ontology of being aged would “manifest itself in experience” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 57). Therefore, bringing everyday experiences into language would pose a potential for the ordinarily hidden phenomenon of being aged to come into the light (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Hence, I sought to garner elder’s stories of everyday events by way of a guided conversation (Johnson, 2002; van Manen, 2001; Warren, 2002). Formally, the conversations lasted about one and a half hours, with several taking two hours or more. Second conversations were conducted with eight of the fifteen participants; three to uncover more in-the-moment stories, and five to continue a conversation or seek clarification.

## Guiding the Conversation

Being in the participant’s familiar home environment, seemed to promote a relaxed and open ambience (Bergum, 1991). On most occasions the visit began with a cup of tea and ‘a little something’ to eat. Social talk provided a way of beginning slowly and moving toward the research conversation (Johnson, 2002). In this way, the coming together was more like a “social encounter” (Fontana, 2002, p. 166). “In-depth interviews develop and build on intimacy: in this respect, they resemble the forms of talking one finds among close friends” (Johnson, p. 104). And while the talk had a purpose beyond a social chat, conceptualising the encounter in this way meant I was constantly mindful of opening up the space into which everyday stories might flow. The conversational guidelines are seen in Appendix VIII.

Open questions were used to create space for the person to respond in their own way and to allow the conversation to go in new directions (Fontana, 2002). And the questioning and questioning even further aimed to enable experiences to be brought into the open (Gadamer, 2004). Yet silences were also used judiciously (Richardson, 2002; van Manen, 2001). “*Hearing and keeping silent* are

possibilities belonging to discursive speech" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 204). In the quiet, a spaciousness opened up. Although I always had at hand my guiding questions and topics, some simply became irrelevant and others did not need to be asked as they had already come up in conversation.

Inviting conversation focused on the ontological rather than the epistemological. Van Manen (2001) proposes the talk might start with a question about the person's embodied, temporal or spatial experience of the thing. When the time seemed right to turn the talk toward the phenomenon of interest, I would usually say "tell me about being [your age]." Importantly, the approach calls for uncovering pre-reflective stories of particular experiences rather than generalised or interpretive comments (Bergum, 1991; van Manen, 2001). Hermeneutically, it is the text related to the in-the-moment experiences wherein understanding of the whole begins to build (Gadamer, 2004). Accordingly, I encouraged talk around specific events. For example, I might invite a story to continue by saying "tell me about the last time you were out in the garden." Or I might encourage a story to continue by asking "then what happened?" The questioning yet further was a mode of uncovering depth and richness; of going beyond a story's surface. On these occasions I would use the person's words if I could, such as "say more about being 'too busy to get old.'" In doing so I endeavoured to hold a naiveté and open up space for the unanticipated (Gadamer). In the conversations the participants were my teachers (Johnson, 2002).

### **Being the Visitor**

Being in each elder's home prompted me to be mindful of my invited place. As visitor, I went into each first encounter with a small gift or koha<sup>12</sup> of food. With the elder as my host I followed his or her guidance in how things should go. For example, when I first visited Frank it was a warm summer's day. He offered to first show me around his garden. Almost an hour passed before we sat down to 'talk.' Then afterwards, Frank said "right I have made lunch." He had at the ready the bread he baked that morning and the freshly picked tomatoes and lettuce from his garden. I quickly learned to give my day over to the research

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<sup>12</sup> Koha is a gift or donation (Ryan, 1989)

encounter in order to take account of everyday circumstances. Moments of reciprocity often came (Wenger, 2002). When I revisited Madge, at her request, together we filled out her census form; Madge dictating, me writing. In this way, the research relationships extended beyond the conversations themselves (Wenger).

Names hold symbolic meaning. Each elder was invited to choose a pseudonym for themselves and for others who were named in their stories. Most immediately ‘knew’ the name or names they wished to use; frequently those of a parent, grandparent or sibling. One chose the name she wished she had been given by her parents. When a pseudonym was not decided upon, the process was left open to be reconsidered later. It is these chosen names which appear throughout this thesis.

### **Managing the Event**

Capturing the text was an important dimension of the research encounter. For that reason, a digital voice recorder was used to facilitate verbatim reproduction. Then, as soon as possible after each conversation, I wrote down the things which pressed upon me and would otherwise be lost to the audio-recording. These writings were of the things I noticed and experienced. They took on the form of an ‘introductory story’ about the person, their everyday and their historical context. They became my contextual ground for the research text itself. I also wrote down my reflections on how I was within the dialectical encounter. Often these self-reflective writings formed the basis for my doctoral supervision. It was a way of building my competence for being in the hermeneutic phenomenological engagement.

Soon after each research conversation the spoken text was transformed into a written text by way of transcription. Although methodologically it was not essential for me to transcribe the conversations myself, I found it immensely beneficial. In doing the transcribing, for all but the first three conversations, I experienced an enriched engagement with the text and found a deep familiarity within it. It meant I could manage the timeliness of producing the written text. It meant giving myself over to its production within a one to two-day time frame.

And it meant the words retained a freshness for me. As I transcribed I often heard things I had not noticed during the conversation itself. I could hear unasked questions. Some of these I took back to the person and some came into my hermeneutic engagement with the written text. Nevertheless, producing verbatim transcripts was primarily a means of getting to the anecdotes within. They took me to a ‘textual expression of the lived experience.’

## Capturing the Anecdotic

Each participant’s written words were gathered into anecdotes. The terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are often used to describe what is drawn from research transcripts. However all spoken text is ‘narrative’ and ‘a story’ can suggest a fictional account of something (Caelli, 2001). Whereas ‘anecdote’ implies a particular type of story (van Manen, 2001). ‘Anecdote’ translates from the Greek word “*anekdota*, [meaning] things unpublished...a short, pithy narrative; a passage of private life” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 38). The word itself being derived from four meanings; “*an-*, not; *ekdotos*, published; from *ek-*, out, [and] *didōmi*, I give” (Hayward & Sparkes, p. 38). Hence, the word ‘anecdote’ holds within it the meaning of being given for a purpose. In its pithiness, an anecdote carries an intensity of meaning. In its telling of the private life, an anecdote holds the potential to show that which is ordinarily hidden in the everyday. It is understood as a story which makes “comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (van Manen, p. 116). Therefore the character of the anecdotic means it is an apt way of referring to the phenomenological story.

The transcripts themselves formed an accurate record of the dialogical content and sequence but they showed the disarray of the conversational engagement. “Nobody talks in prose” (Richardson, 2002, p. 879). Often one story would start then lead off into another, before coming back somewhere in the flow of dialogue. Frequently sentences would be incomplete or grammatically incorrect yet their meanings were clear. Still, the messiness of conversational text can act to conceal its essence (Caelli, 2001). For these reasons, the original verbatim transcripts were not returned to the participants. Yet while the purpose of rendering anecdotes from research transcripts is clear, there is little written on

how to do so. Caelli offers a detailed explanation of creating narratives from her transcripts; however she describes a method for phenomenological reduction, consistent with Husserlian phenomenology. And van Manen (2001) portrays the nature and place of anecdotes in phenomenology, but does not describe how to render them from a spoken text. Thus, the way of drawing anecdotes forth from the conversational text itself evolved as I went. The way showed itself.

When, in the talking, a story was disjointed, I pulled the pieces together. When repetitions in the text did not add to the meaning, such as bringing an emphasis, I removed duplications. And I tidied grammatical structures so the meaning was not lost in an awkwardness of language. Always I sought to leave the essential meanings untouched. Still, not all the conversational text was captured. Some was not related to the research question and was simply left to stand in the transcripts. Some was about history and, while it helped construct contextual meaning, it did not directly show an experience of being aged. Ultimately, all anecdotes drawn from each participant's transcript were compiled into a unique 'collection.' As each elder's 'collection of anecdotes' would be returned to them, I was mindful of making the compilations aesthetically pleasing. For each I added a cover page, a table of contents and a covering letter thanking the person for their participation. The letter invited consideration of the text's accuracy and completeness. As a way of conveying respectfulness, I chose to personally deliver each elder's collection of anecdotes rather simply send them by mail.

Subsequently, agreement on minor changes and confirmation of the anecdotes was usually done by way of a phone conversation. Otherwise I visited the person to work through any corrections. None of the participants asked for an anecdote to be omitted from their collection. Two participants wanted more detailed editing to correct their grammar, and one participant wanted part of an anecdote changed as he thought some of his friends could recognise him from the story. Always when changes were made I returned the corrected compilation in person.

This giving back of the collected anecdotes evoked benefits which I had not fully anticipated in the beginning. Several elders asked to have their own name used on their copy instead of their pseudonym. They wanted something to pass on to children or grandchildren. One elder, who said he was ready for his time in this world to come to an end, passed his collection on to his daughter. He told me she read it a few times and she cried. Then he passed it on to his doctor to read because his doctor was not listening to his voiced readiness to go. Another elder passed his collection around his numerous children and grandchildren so they might understand how his everyday was. Stories like this showed me the inherent worth of the methodology and helped me to be deeply humble in my role as researcher.

### **Capturing the Visual Text**

The first three participants were aged 95, 80 and 97 respectively. I was drawn to notice how the hands made themselves present during our conversations. The skin's visible lines and translucency caused me to wonder about what was revealed and what remained hidden in being aged. Different questions pressed upon me. Is what is visible in the hands an announcing or a semblance of being aged? What do the hands say about the ontology of being aged? How might the hands, in what they do, influence the everyday experience of being aged? I saw the hands as rich text (Emmison, 2004). They drew me into a hermeneutic encounter. The thoughts led me to request further ethical approval to take photographic images of only the participant's hands whilst engaged in a chosen occupation. All consented to a photograph being taken. Each chose a deeply familiar and precious occupation to be doing.

In capturing each photographic image I aimed to convey something of the person, their agedness and their everyday world. This visual text is brought forward in the next chapter. The images are not offered as a factual record of how the hands were but as a showing of what my eyes saw (Emmison, 2004). They became a way of giving something else back to the participants through the prints produced. I came to apprehend a fuller benefit. As an illustration, Tom had become his wife's carer. His handcraft of model boat building had become lost to

his being the carer. Tom asked for two prints of his photograph. He wanted one to give to the ‘commandant’ of the model boat club. It seemed that, through the captured image, Tom reconnected with something lost.

## To the Thinking

To think is to confine yourself to a  
single thought that one day stands  
still like a star in the world’s sky

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 4).

Being in the mode of interpreting the text was a learning to be ‘in thinking.’ The hermeneutic engagement is a thinking engagement. Heideggerian hermeneutic “research is thinking” (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, in press). Hence, my purpose of gathering the text into anecdotes was for the sake of thinking about the meaning of being aged. Dwelling with the anecdotal text was primordial. It began with each research conversation and continued through to dwelling with each and every anecdote. I ‘listened’ attentively to the phenomenological descriptions of things as they were experienced in the moment. And I listened in closely to the evocative words and phrases which appeared in the text. The idiomatic, the metaphoric and the harking back to something else came to matter. In the thinking, pieces of text stood ‘still like a star in the world’s sky.’ They drew my wonderment.

## Being in Conversation with the Anecdotes

Discourse cheers us to companionable  
reflection. Such reflection neither  
parades polemical opinions nor does it  
tolerate complaisant agreement. The sail  
of thinking keeps trimmed to the  
wind of the matter

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 6).

My way of keeping the ‘sail of thinking trimmed to the matter’ of understanding being aged is set out next. Primordially, the gathering and the interpreting of text went hand in hand. Fundamentally, they were one process (van

Manen, 2001). My understandings of meaning from one participant's anecdotes thus informed my going into subsequent research conversations. One informed the other in a deeply entwined way. One by one, each anecdote was brought into the 'interpretative text;' ready for interpretation (Silverman, 1991). And each 'trimming of the sail' threw a different glimmer of light upon my interpretation of the phenomenon itself.

In the play of thinking, I moved from an immersion in the 'whole text' of each elder's anecdotes to illuminating the particulars embedded within each part and back again (N. Diekelmann, 2001; Jasper, 2004). Ontologically, I only came to 'know' the hermeneutic engagement by being in it (van Manen, 2002). I experienced being in the mode of an "unending conversation" (N. Diekelmann, p. 57). Through this movement I attempted to keep my gaze directed towards the hidden phenomenon of being aged.

### **Being in the Hermeneutic Circle**

"Heidegger once remarked, what is important is not how we get *out* of the hermeneutic circle (which, arguably, is impossible anyway), but how we initially get *in*" (Jasper, 2004, p. 21). I attempted to do so by approaching the text with a sense of 'wonderment' at, and a 'not-knowing' about, what lay before me. My quest was to experience a receptiveness and attentiveness to the text itself. Figal (2004) proposes that being receptive to what is different opens the way for understanding. In addition, I dwelled with the text in an uninterrupted way. It was a 'trying-to-be-attentive' to what the text was saying (Gadamer, 2004). I 'listened' by reading and rereading. And I 'listened' by writing. I would simply start to write, not knowing where my thinking would go. Writing engendered understanding (Schulz, 2006). It was through the writing that possible meanings emerged into language. Jasper advocates for writing as being "a kind of action that can work on you in ways far beyond our mere understanding" (p. 8). The thinking came with writing and the writing came with thinking. The writing opened up listening beyond the words (N. Diekelmann, 2001). Yet many of my primordial writings did not stay; they were along the way of thinking.

Typically I finished writing around one anecdote before moving on to the next. And mostly I worked with one collection of anecdotes before moving into the next research conversation. But invariably I found myself going back; revisiting and returning again to my earlier writings as other thinking came. Ontologically, it was a visceral experience. Seemingly, I ‘carried’ the research text within me as I went about my day. Often something which had deeply puzzled me suddenly came ‘out of the blue.’ It would call me back to the writing. Constantly the ‘sail of thinking’ was ‘trimmed to the wind of the matter.’ I found myself being moved beyond my immediate thoughts without being lost to the unknown (Figal, 2004).

Yet the thinking could not be forced. I had to let it come in its own time. I had to let it be. Slowly descriptive-ness gave way to interpretive-ness as my familiarity grew with this mode of engaging. Hermeneutically, the layers of interpreted meaning began to show themselves as being possible ‘truths’ (N. Diekelmann, 2001). Always, within each anecdote, some text stood out. Some words seemed to hold richer ‘interpretative’ content. I found by underlining this text I was drawn into a deeper hermeneutic engagement with it. It was a mode of ‘pointing to’ the evocative which called to me (Schulz, 2006). This method focused my attentiveness and it helped my supervisors follow my interpretive journey.

In the dialogical encounter I asked questions of the text. I asked “what is going on in this anecdote?” and “what is its meaning?” (van Manen, 2001, p. 87). I asked “what has this got to do with being aged?” “Is this an announcing of being aged itself?” “Is this a semblance of being aged?” “What does it mean?” “What is not said here?” “What am I taking-for-granted or not seeing” (Bergum, 1991)? And “how does this text tell me something of the whole text?” As I practiced the dialectical conversation I became more adept at making the interpretive leap; of going beyond the text itself. I worked to uncover the hidden meanings within the text (N. Diekelmann, 2001).

A depth of capturing ‘what stayed with me’ came through writing poetry. In my poetic representations I aimed to convey the elements of sound, through the

rhythms and pauses; sight, through constructing images in language; and ideation, through aiming to evoke thoughts and feelings (Richardson, 2002). Thinking about Ferguson's experience of being aged, I wrote:

He is

the boy riding horse  
 the young man driving  
 the father providing a home  
 the craftsman laying bricks  
 the grandfather gardening

He is

the aged man sitting  
 working hard to dress  
 looking out the window  
 waiting for time to pass  
 feeling himself fade away

He is

all of these

His past, present and future come together in his everyday

### **Interpreting the Maori Elders' Text**

Fundamental to the integrity of interpreting the Maori elders' text was my partnership with Te Puna Hauora. Once I had written my interpretations for each collection of anecdotes I delivered them to the Kaumatua. When ready, he would call me into a conversation with him. Being together and 'with' the interpretive text was a special opportunity for me to grow my understandings about the world of Maori. Sometimes the Kaumatua guided me in using language in the correct way to convey the meanings in the text. And sometimes he corrected my spelling of Maori words. Mostly the meanings in my interpretive text were not changed but the open dialogue served to deepen and enrich my understandings. It is not a pathway I could have walked alone.

### **Knowing When it was Time**

I wrote in my reflective journal 'how has a year gone by?' It was the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2006. I had been feeling as though I could go on talking with elders

for ever. Yet in a more pressing way things were pointing to it being time to move on. On the broader horizon of ‘what was showing through,’ the pieces of the hermeneutical picture were showing a same-ness. I wrote ‘I am ready to leave this section of the woods and start down a new trail.’ Nine days later my journal entry reflected back my supervisors’ thoughts; ‘yes, you are at the end of the data gathering.’

## **Bringing the Phenomenon of Being Aged into the Light**

To head toward a star—this only

(Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 4).

Coming to understand the meaning of being aged was not simply a cognitive process. Ontologically, it became something of who I was; of whom I am. This phase of the research journey was a moving from being in an interpretive engagement with the subjective anecdotes to a broader reflection on the phenomenon of being aged itself. It was a mode of thinking across the whole research text. It was a mode of writing toward a “phenomenological textual description” (van Manen, 2001, p. 106). Thus, the study’s findings are an ‘essencing’ of the understanding which unfolded. Primarily it came through ‘being in’ conversation with the whole research text and thinking about the things which showed. It was a way of reflecting deeply on how being aged may show itself from itself in the everyday. It was a mode of wondering about what was brought into the light and what remained in darkness.

Hence, the phenomenological reflective engagement was one of explicating ontological meanings. Hermeneutically, it was a continual movement from considering the whole research text to taking account of its parts, ensuring that one was reflected in the other. Particular anecdotes showed through as rich illustrations of each notion (N. Diekelmann, 2001; Jasper, 2004). Together they say something of the meaning of being aged. Van Manen (2001) describes the mode of interpreting the text’s meaning as being “more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (p. 79). Where I arrived does not mean I understand ‘being aged’ better

than the elders' themselves. My interpretations may not have immediately been the elder's interpretations. As the researcher I had the privilege of being enlivened by a continually moving horizon of understanding across the entire dialectical engagement (N. Diekelmann). For this reason, my interpretations of the research text were not returned to the participants. Paradoxically however, those who are aged, or who are familiar with the experience of being aged, should be able to recognise the meanings unveiled. In the recognition would be the 'phenomenological nod;' the signifying 'yes,' that is it.

## **Evaluating the Trustworthiness**

"The trustworthiness of a study is known first by researchers themselves who test out their thinking by engaging in everyday conversations with those who share the interest or who are living the phenomenon"

(Smythe et al., in press).

A study's trustworthiness relies upon the soundness of its integrity as a whole. Here I outline the process of determining which 'conditions' were applied in promoting and evaluating the quality of this study. Various criterion-based approaches were considered, but there is little agreement on the evaluative notions and language used (Annells, 1999; Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Koch, 1996; Lincoln, 1995; Walters, 1994). Furthermore, what constitutes 'goodness' in qualitative research is ever-evolving (Marshall, 1990). Currently, it seems generally accepted that quality is rooted within a field's intellectual tradition. This means there are no, and cannot be, fixed evaluative conditions for all qualitative methodologies (Engel & Kuzel, 1992). Paradigm-specific judgements of trustworthiness should, therefore, take account of the ontological, epistemological and methodological propositions (Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Lincoln, 1990). This thinking opens the way for me to articulate the particular conditions of trustworthiness for this interpretive phenomenological study (Annells, 1999; Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Koch, 1996).

Three existing frameworks are drawn on: Annells' (1999) criteria for evaluating phenomenological research, supplemented by two of van Manen's

(1997) principles for writing good phenomenological texts and Emden and Sandelowski's (1999) proposed "criterion of uncertainty" (p. 5).

### **Coherence**

The condition of coherence is modified from Annells' (1999) "criterion four—an appropriate inquiry approach" (p. 11). Coherence exists when the overall project and its parts are a cohesive whole. The congruence between the philosophical foundations and the study's design and implementation ought to be evident. I believe this study shows coherence. An emphasis was placed upon the congruence of the research question and research philosophy, the articulation of the philosophical underpinnings, the interpretation of how they informed the methods and the illumination of philosophical understandings within the interpretive text. In the Heideggerian tradition, I did not aim to 'bracket out' my presuppositions but, worked to see how my experiences and horizons of understanding came into play in play from the outset. And rather than stay with a hermeneutic interpretation of the participants' subjective stories, I strived to apprehend a universal form of the phenomenon and to say something of the meaning of being aged itself.

### **Lived-Throughness**

'Lived-throughness' is a principle of phenomenological writing. "Lived throughness...[is when] the phenomenon is placed concretely in the lifeworld so that the reader may experientially recognise it" (van Manen, 1997, p. 351). I consider this study achieves a quality of 'lived-throughness.' The research explored an ontological question and took an ontological view of the 'being' of being aged. It was assumed that a phenomenon of being aged would tend to be taken-for-granted and therefore 'hidden.' Hence, the conversations with elders focused on describing particular 'lived experiences' in the ordinary day in advanced age. As interpreted, it was through these anecdotes that glimpses of being aged appeared. It was a matter of 'letting' the phenomenon show itself rather than 'exposing' it. And in line with Heidegger's understanding of the primordial essence of being human, this study was located within the ordinary experience of human existence.

### **Cogency**

Cogency is drawn from van Manen's (1997) phenomenological writing principles. It is determined by the text's potency for conviction. Cogency is enabled through giving "key words their full value, so that layers of phenomenological meaning become strongly embedded in the text" (van Manen, p. 355). It is an 'intensification' of text, illuminating the potentially hidden meanings. I worked in different ways to achieve a textual cogency. Drawing out the anecdotes from the participants' stories was a way of letting the richness of the words show through, rather than be obscured by the nature of the conversational text. When interpreting the anecdotes I 'pointed to' the words and phrases which seemed to embody a depth of phenomenal meaning. And I worked to bring my understandings into language which carried the interpretive meanings in powerful ways. At the same time I aimed to remain with the 'original' meanings. If the text presses with some force upon the reader in the same way as it did for me, then cogency is illustrated.

### **Evoked Understanding**

This condition is modified from Annells' (1999) "criterion one—an understandable and appreciable product" (p. 10). To evoke is to "call up; to summon forth" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 394). Thus, how the study and its finding are presented ought to evoke understanding for the reader. I have worked to make the anecdotal and the interpretive texts understandable. The readers of this thesis will be in a good position to judge this condition. Evoked understanding will be evident if readers are drawn to and held by the text, if they find it 'calls' them, or if a shift in understanding is experienced in the reading. To date, I have had numerous opportunities to present something of my work to different audiences; three are described in more detail in the final section. At these events, different people of varying ages from medical students and colleagues to the participants themselves have shown or voiced a 'knowing' about what my interpretations are saying. I take these indicators as evocations of understanding.

### **Uncertainty**

Two notions are brought together in the condition of uncertainty; Annells' (1999) "criterion two—an understandable process of inquiry" (p. 10) and Emden and Sandelowski's (1999) proposed inclusion of a "criterion of uncertainty" (p. 5). Finiteness and tentativeness are hallmarks of hermeneutics and phenomenology and thus should be evident through the thinking and the research methods. I believe uncertainty shows in this study. I worked to 'see' the limits of apprehending my horizon of understanding and the limits to my 'openness' for questioning and interpreting. Yet it was challenging to try and keep 'seeing' what I could not easily see. So I worked to remain open to the reality that my knowing is not 'the' knowing; the truth. And I aimed to show my sense of being on the way and not of having arrived at a complete understanding.

### **Applicability**

The condition of applicability is modified from Annells' (1999) "criterion three—a useful product" (p. 11). It considers the relevance of the study's findings to particular applied domains in the 'real' world. This project was not in itself an applied study but I strongly believe the findings hold relevant messages for application. The research outcomes point to potential applications across several domains. In the final discussion chapter I suggest their implications for practice and education, as well as for further research.

In summary, I worked to meet the conditions of trustworthiness selected for this study. And through the writing of this thesis I aimed to lay things out in a way that enables the reader to judge its quality as an interpretive phenomenological project.

## **Unveiling My Understandings**

Toward the end of my 'solitary and slow' pathway of thinking, three particular events offered an opportunity to unveil my understandings to a critical audience. In June 2007 I presented a paper at the Institute for Interpretive Phenomenology hosted by George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. It took the form of a 30-minute paper. There was only time to overview how I was informed by the philosophies, introduce the findings and focus in on one

phenomenal meaning of being aged. The ensuing discussion affirmed my drawing through of philosophies into the research methodology. Tears came to one person as she engaged with the spoken and visual text. This was a phenomenological nod. She was deeply reminded of her mother.

Then in September 2007 I hosted a morning tea for the elders who had so generously shared their stories and the others who had contributed so much to my journey; the Puna Hauora Kaumatua and my doctoral supervisors. Primarily it was a way of giving thanks as I moved toward the end of my research pathway. I experienced a sense of looking forward to seeing each of the participants again. And although I held a perpetual ‘knowing’ that some might pass away before this study was complete, I was now faced with this reality. Three had since died. Their passing brought a sense of loss to me yet this was bathed in a stronger sense of privilege; the privilege of having been entrusted with their stories. Regretfully four others could not be there; one had moved out of town with her daughter and I was unable to establish contact, one was in hospital and two others had commitments which came up on the day. Still, I experienced the delight of welcoming eight elders and a cousin who had featured in one’s stories. But life’s unfolding pattern announced itself further. Two of the men now lived in residential care. I could not help but recall their stories about being at home and what they enjoyed doing. For them I felt the magnitude of what they had lost from their everyday.

This was my turn to be the host; to be a ‘good’ host as each of them had been to me. It was a time of embracing the different cultures; Maori and non-Maori. Opening with a mihi whakatau, spoken first in Maori and then in English, was a way of acknowledging their status as ‘elders.’ To do otherwise would have been disrespectful to the Kaumatua and elder Maori. Then I spoke; firstly in acknowledging my guests then in sharing what ‘showed’ in the study. I saw this as a celebrating and an informing rather than a formal presentation. Most poignantly, it was what came to light in the ensuing conversation which mattered. Sharing a few of these moments, everyone clapped when Frank said he was now 99. It was a spontaneous showing of respectfulness. And there was silence when Frank spoke of his having become old; when he said *suddenly the hammer*

*dropped.* Then applause came again when Madge mentioned she was now 96. And others nodded as she said how nice it was to be invited out and to be ‘with’ others. She was not expecting sympathy when she reflected aloud how they *are all ‘alone’* at the retirement village. She was just saying how it is.

Thus, in different ways my interpretations were affirmed. I felt the phenomenological nods. As a way of bringing the gathering to a close, the elders were invited to come together for a final photograph of ‘the hands.’ This was a poignant moment in my research journey. A few days later I received a thank you card from Mary. She said she enjoyed being part of the study.

The third event came in October 2007 when I presented my work and my thinking to the Heidegger Reading Group at the AUT University. This was an opening up to my peers; to fellow doctoral students and to Heideggerian thinkers. It was an opportunity for a rich discussion of the study’s philosophical underpinnings and an unveiling of my emergent ‘thesis of the thesis.’ Their being deeply interested in interpretive phenomenology was the fertile ground for talking. Reflecting afterwards, the collective thinking enriched my understanding of some of the philosophical notions. It pointed me towards rethinking some of the way I was using language, such as ‘everydayness.’ It provided me with new references to follow up on. And it led me to keep thinking and rethinking my emerging thesis of the meaning of being aged.

A full list of all research outputs from the study is given in Appendix IX.

## A Reflection

Laying out how this study was designed and built was the purpose of this chapter. I aimed to show how the philosophical underpinnings were brought into play in ‘doing’ the research. Hence, the thinking which informed each turn and each step taken along the research pathway was illuminated. It was a path walked with a Maori partner, bringing cultural integrity into the thinking and doing. Across the chapter, the description moved from the identification of potential participants through to the ways of interpreting the research text. The fifteen community-dwelling men and women who participated in the study were introduced. They were four Maori elders and eleven non-Maori. Their stories of

everyday events were gathered through conversation and transformed into written anecdotes. Collectively, these anecdotes were the research text. Photographic images of the elder's hands brought a visual text to the interpretive process and stand as a potent signifier of the 'realness' of the people and their passions. Working through the paradigm-specific conditions of trustworthiness used to guide this study highlights the ways research 'goodness' was promoted. The anecdotal text gathered by way of conversations with the elders was rich and varied. Interpreting the text was a slow and thoughtful journey; a journey of thinking through questioning, thinking through dwelling and thinking through writing. Always my gaze was turned towards the hidden phenomenon of being aged. Always it was a moving toward an understanding of the meaning of being aged. Next, before moving into the findings chapters, the participants are introduced by way of the visual text. The images of the hands 'show' what I saw and the accompanying stories disclose something of who each person is.

Pushing off from the bank  
and finding myself on the way without  
there being a way

Trusting my not-knowing was  
a way of giving myself over to knowing  
without ever truly knowing

Being in conversation with the words as being  
a questioning and keeping silent and questioning  
again and wondering

Walking alongside the Kaumatua and feeling  
the warmth of his hand wrapped lightly  
around mine, guiding

Dwelling with the pithiness  
and letting the thoughts come when  
they did and as they did

Experiencing the thinking through writing  
and re-writing and going back to write  
again, getting as close as I can

Feeling the wonderment at a glimpse;  
is this it?

## **Chapter Five: The Being of Being Aged**

### **The Hands**

Being-in-the-play of being-in-the-world,  
expressing the essence of the person, opening  
a window to the soul.

Presencing the handed-on of what has come before,  
doing by practical wisdom, being  
a foreshadowing of the yet-to-come.

Illuminating without revealing the phenomenon itself,  
shadowing the always already covered over, showing  
an appearance of being aged.

**Madge, 95**



*I did tatting when I was much younger. I did a lot of embroidery in those early days, travelling on the ferries and all that. Tatting was my thing, and knitting; we had a wool shop. But I have got no one to do it for now. This piece is one of mine, the last one I made before I moved here, but I haven't got much here. I have got about three or four shuttles of cotton I use. I find I can do it, but not as fast because you know you pull one knot after another knot. But I haven't got much I have tatted myself; I have mostly given them away at the time. They were made for somebody. I wouldn't make them for myself. No, no. Whatever I do now has only got to be passed on doesn't it.*

## Margaret, 80



*Figures, I have always loved figures. I used to work in a women's manufacturing place and I used to price all the material before it went to the factories, like artificial silk for lining from Portugal. And I used to have to go from home country, and all the shipping and all the trucks, everything all added on to what that material actually cost when it was landed. So sudoku is pure enjoyment. It is great, I didn't play it at first; I didn't know how. I have worked out my own method. I do one now whenever I can grab one. I have never bought a book of them; there are enough in the paper for me to spend my time on. This is a hard one, but it's coming out so far so I am very pleased.*

**Frank, 97**

*Oh I've always enjoyed gardening. I started gardening when I was about six and I've always been interested in gardening and propagating and rooting cuttings and I don't like throwing stuff away so if I'm pruning a shrub and there are some nice shoots there I will stick them in. My interest with gardening, I suppose it would have started on some of the farms because we always had a vegetable garden on the farm and mum was a keen gardener. As boys or girls we first started off in the garden growing radishes because they grow quick but you just go on from one thing to another.*

## Clark, 89



*Before the war I was in the fashion trade and after the war I went back into the fashion trade. It was a lifetime career for me, so when in 1981 I had a heart attack I realised that I had just got to give it up so I gave it up. And I have had angina for the last 25 years. Now, the first thing on Friday when I come home with the International Express I do the crossword. They have a crossword puzzle in which they give you a slight clue, only two letters in the whole of the puzzle. I usually don't know the answer to the clue so then I have got to do the crossword puzzle, any way you like. I have just got to think out. By that time it's lunch time so I get my lunch.*

**Christina, 93**

*I suppose the Irish heritage is very strong because of my father and mother. It was my mother who encouraged me with the singing and music. And my father liked it too. I thought we were very lucky as children growing up because our parents would be humming or singing arias, tunes from Gilbert and Sullivan, from Verdi operas, from Wagner; we heard all those while we were children growing up. I went to a convent school and took up music teaching as a profession. I have been teaching singing, harmony, and the piano for years and I have been organist in all the churches I have attended.*

**Curly, 97**

*I was as a child very delicate, I had pneumonia. I was six months in bed when I was quite young and when they said do you want to play the piano I couldn't have been bothered so I never learned. So I like listening to music, playing patience and reading. I take them in turn, I don't think one is more important, I think they are all important because they are things that I like and they're part of my life. I can't see any reason why I should stop; I mean there is no reason I should. Unless I couldn't read, that would be unfortunate, or if I went deaf. Yes if I lost my sight and couldn't read I wouldn't like it at all because I have been so used to it, all these years.*

**Ferguson, 97**

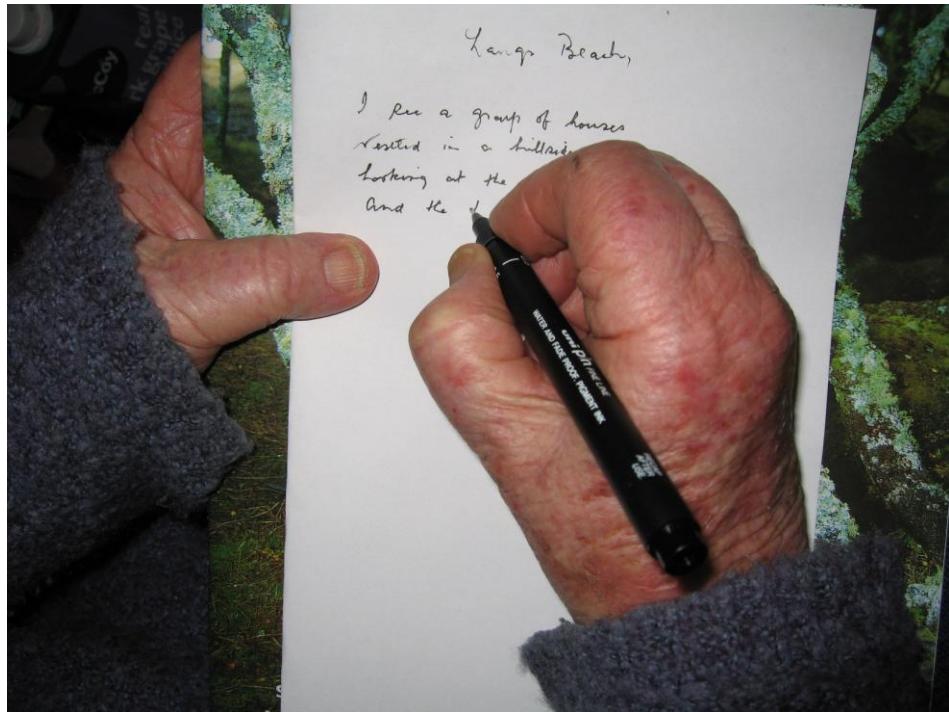
*I was just born and they put me on a horse. I grew up with them. Of course I rode to school. And at 16 my father chucked me out and said go and get a job. So I went and got a job. My first job was poisoning rabbits, then I got a job on the farm; I was there a long time. After that I served my time as a brick layer. I wasn't just a bricklayer; there is a difference between a bricklayer and somebody who knows how to lay bricks. My wife came from Scotland and we always stopped work at five and that was time to have a drink and relax before tea. So all the family have a drink and stop work at five. It just carries on.*

**Tom, 91**



*We were tent and sail makers so we were pretty well off for camping gear. There are not many camping grounds in New Zealand that we haven't been in. I used to make anything out of canvas, umbrellas; and anything out of leather, satchels, suitcases. And I knew a fair bit about boats but I have never been a boat builder. Now I belong to the Ancient Mariners and we build the old type of boats. See we are all old salts. Most of these clubs they buy their boat already made up but in this club there is an unwritten rule you have got to make your own. I have made about 15 boats. This one is made out of canvas, Captain Blithe and all the crew. I keep my tools up here now. If I leave them down there they go rusty.*

Merrill, 89



*I have been in this house for 66 years. We bought the land in 1940 and then in 1941 my husband had to go to war. So we decided we would just build this part in the beginning and if he didn't come back I could have it as a bach. And of course he came back so that was that. Well my husband died in 1981 and so I thought well I wasn't going to just sit around and do nothing so I joined a writing group in town. They did poetry and everything to do with English. I am going to send this one in for the next publication of poetry. I never could recite my poems. When I read them I am aware of why I have written them.*

**Mary, 91**



*I have been deaf since I was four; I had septic scarlet fever. Then my mother died when I was six and I was brought up by an aunty and uncle and I don't know how uncle did it but he got me to read. I have realised if you can read you can learn. I was involved in a lot of things with the church when I was younger, I was a steward, I was a reader, and I was a pastoral convenor for 16 years; but I don't think I could do it now. Now I do all the painting of the cards for the church and I do the painting of cards for the stroke club. These are the sort of cards I do; I paint them, then I gild them. I used to paint but I am not a painter. I am only a graphic artist. I couldn't do a beautiful watercolour.*

**Florence, 90**

*My brother was the eldest and he and I were very, very close and very much alike and when we went to school we were always taken for twins. He used to ride horses and I was terrified of horses. So this one day I walked up to the horse and got the bit and shoved it in his mouth like I had seen my brother do. Then I got on his back and walked him around the house and banged on the kitchen window for mum to see me. After that I used to ride. Now I have outlived nearly all of my friends and family. But I do think pets help you; I have never been without a dog but I never had a Maltese before. I always had poodles since 1960 odd, and I did become a poodle specialist and judged overseas. I enjoyed it; I loved that.*

**Matelot, 74**

*I grew up in the Hokianga. My family milked cows; that is about all they had. I joined the Navy in 1952 and then I got married in 1958. We have been here for 40 years. All that used to be garden out there. I used to rotary hoe the whole lot. Years ago one of my mates gave me some tomato plants. You would never believe the size of those tomatoes; they were huge. I saved the seed but they were never the same. Well, now it is a lot easier to grow them in pots. You just put the seed inside the seedling pod and that is it. Once they have two or three leaves on them I put them in a pot outside. But I like to grow them because of the cost of bloody tomatoes. This is the second year I have been growing my tomatoes in pots like this.*

Ella, 93



*It would be about 1970 when I started this tapestry. I did all that quickly, then I put it away because I had other things I was doing. I can't remember what now. Oh I think my mother and father had a lot to do with who I am today. Well, they were always interested in things and always kept us busy; reading, music, theatre, but not only that, being with people. She taught music and she learnt to knit and crochet but everything turned into a hat. Oh we had a lot of hats. And she would say go and wash your face, you can't sing about Jesus with a dirty face. So she taught me about that while she was teaching me everything else. I hadn't realised that until now. She was always teaching me.*

**Pani, 71**

*I was born on the West Coast. When I was about 14 the TB epidemic arose. I caught the bug and ended up in hospital for two and a half years with TB and meningitis. All my relatives were passing on so my brother decided to bring me up to the North Island. My dad had passed away before that; I would have been about five I suppose. Then my mother died in the 1950s. I met up with my lady in 1960 and we got married. We moved here a year ago. We have given all our gardening away and the neighbours have got all pot plants now. I see this old fellow out in his garden; it is only a small property and yet he is weeding it and he is in his 90s. But that is wonderful. A lot of them are like that here.*

May, 77



*I had seven children. They are all grown up now and they are all alive, all seven on them. All my sons drive and they have all got vehicles but when I wanted to go back home, oh God I just about had to cry to have someone take me. Aye. Mind you I have got nothing back there now. I started playing darts back home in Taranaki, about 1969. I tried to get my husband to play but he wasn't interested. I always go to darts no matter what. I started off with some long thin ones but they were very light and they were no good for me; I had to get the weight. I have to feel the dart in my hand to play. I have had these ones since I started darts. The only thing I have changed is my flights. But they always stay in my bag I never take them out, never. They are always there so I don't forget them.*

## Into the Great Oneness



But the craft of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine. The hand does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand holds. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a sign. Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great oneness. The hand is all this, and this is the true handicraft.

(Heidegger, 1964/1993, pp. 380-381)

## A Reflection

With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighbourhood....Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows. (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 150)

Guided by the meanings revealed and concealed within the elders' anecdotes, the study's findings are like the stream flowing through the meadows. All other things gather around the stream. Thus, the four findings chapters which follow are the heart and life blood of this study. What flows through their core are the everyday events in the lives of fifteen elders. In their sameness and differentness the findings illuminate something of the phenomenon of being aged. While each chapter brings forward one phenomenological notion, ontologically they are inseparable. Each lights up one part of an interactive whole. They bring into language my interpretations of how the phenomenon of being aged showed itself from itself amid the research text. They are the culmination of my phenomenological reflections on the whole text. Nevertheless, my writings are not intended to portray 'being aged' as a generalised ontological phenomenon. What appears has the quality of being "thisly" (Harman, 2007, p. 28); of being particular to these elders' lives and this study's circumstances. Yet in bringing my understandings into the light, the text may seem strangely familiar to the reader; for such is the nature of phenomenological research.

The words follow an interpretive pathway through the rich ground of illustrative anecdotes. A mode of pointing to the evocative is used in drawing the texts' meanings through into my hermeneutic phenomenological interpretations (Schulz, 2006). The textual flow unveils my moving horizons of understanding, whilst always already knowing 'the truth' will not be fully visible at the end.

# Chapter Six: Being in the Everyday

Being the age they were, the participants in this study had most of their lives behind them. As such, they come into each day having already experienced innumerable other days and events throughout their life course. In conversation, they spoke of doing the mundane, always-there things in their day, of responding to things which unexpectedly appeared and of making time to do things which particularly interested them. And while the everyday, being what it is, meant tomorrow might be much like today or yesterday, the importance of having things to do as well as something to look forward to showed through. Hence the stories embodied a complex interplay of being engaged in the everyday and temporality. Rather than time being a measurable, linear phenomenon, the stories illuminate the complex temporal nature of the lived experience. Thus, the situated, engaged nature of being in the everyday means theoretical descriptions are not enough to understand the experience of being aged. Accordingly, the anecdotes offered in this chapter show how being in the everyday discloses something of the hidden phenomenon of being aged.

## **Philosophical Underpinnings**

Existentially, “human life is not something visible from the outside, but must be seen in the very act, performance, or execution of its own reality, which always exceeds any of the properties that we can list about it” (Harman, 2007, p. 25). Heideggerian phenomenology, therefore, interprets the ontological nature of ‘Being-in’ as the fundamental human state of Being-in-the-world. The ‘in’ refers not to a spatial relationship but draws its meaning from the archaic German word “*innan*” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 80). Translated, it means ‘to reside’ or ‘to dwell.’ In this context it signifies being accustomed to, familiar with or looking after something. So the ‘Being-in’ of Being-in-the-world is already understood as having the character of everyday familiarity. Hence, when Heidegger speaks of Dasein, he communicates an understanding of the human entity’s being in the

world as being “‘there’ in an everyday manner” (p. 171). In line with these understandings, ‘being in the everyday’ is a being engaged with things one ordinarily concerns oneself with. Being in the everyday draws on the notion that “‘one is’ what one does” (Heidegger, p. 283). Explained ontologically, the essential nature of being human is therefore not in our ability to think but in “our existing in a place with particular things and established ways of doing things” (Wrathall, 2005, p. 15). In other words, being in the everyday is characterised by ‘everydayness.’

Colloquially, ‘everyday’ signifies something as being usual or commonplace (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982). “Everyday experience is what happens in typical form today as it has done yesterday and will do tomorrow” (Sandywell, 2004, p. 163). Ontologically though, ‘everydayness’ expresses a particular way of going about things. Everydayness is related to the understanding that being in the world, along with many others with whom we are unacquainted, is a “Being-with-one-another” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 164). Therefore the mode of everydayness is a Being-with in a communal or public way. Thus, “everydayness is a way to be...[which is] more or less familiar to any individual” (Heidegger, p. 422). The notion expresses our generally recognisable ways of existing together in communities whereby, ordinarily, one person’s way of going about things does not stand out from the ways of others. ‘Everydayness’ is a comfortable mode. It signifies an average or undifferentiated way of being in the everyday.

Further to the notion of everydayness, Heidegger (1927/1962) attributes the distinctively human way of Being-in-the-world as consisting of three ontological phenomena; ‘falleness,’ ‘existence’ and ‘thrownness.’ Firstly, falleness is “falling prey or captive to the world” (King, 2001, p. 36). ‘Falling’ thus signifies the “basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness” (Heidegger, p. 219). In falling, Dasein loses himself “among his makings and doings...the things with which he is busy” (King, p. 13). And rather than it being an undesirable mode, falling is peoples’ usual way of being absorbed, or entangled, in everyday matters. As such falleness has ‘the present’ as its temporal character.

Secondly, by ‘existence’ Heidegger (1927/1962) means more than just being real in the same way as inanimate objects can be described as existing. ‘Existing’ stems from the Latin word “*exsistere* [meaning] ‘to step forth’” (Inwood, 1999, p. 60). Ontologically, ‘existence’ signifies an apprehension of the self as existing. “It is only in his own factual existence that a man can understand ‘I myself am this man; this being is *mine*’” (King, 2001, p. 30). As humans, it means we come to understand ourselves as being uniquely in the world. This understanding opens the way for apprehending possibilities for our own future. It means we can do things for the sake of achieving those possibilities, or not. In other words, “Dasein exists for the sake of itself” (Heidegger, p. 279). Until the end, we are always going towards things which are outstanding; towards the things yet to be achieved in life. Therefore, existing, or being in a mode of possibility, has ‘the future’ as its temporal character.

And thirdly, ‘thrownness’ signifies our already being in the world when we come to understand the self as existing. In other words, we do not come into being in a planned way but are ‘thrown’ into the world. We are already ‘there’ in the world when we apprehend ourselves as such. Therefore, what is disclosed to us in our thrownness is that we ‘are and have to be’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Amid an everyday event, thrownness is the experience of having something which is always already there suddenly disclosed to us. Accordingly, ‘the past’ is the temporal character of thrownness.

Fallenness, existence and thrownness are understood as inter-related and inseparable. Being in the everyday, therefore, has the temporal nature of ‘being in’ the present, the future and the past. At any moment all three temporal dimensions are in play, although one come to the fore (Harman, 2007). In the context of this study, having something to look forward to, having something to do and having the past be present are visible in the temporal nature of being in the everyday. ‘Having’ is not about possessing things; it is about being engaged in and experiencing something.

The anecdotes brought forward throughout this chapter are selected for their poignancy in illustrating ‘being in the everyday’ in advanced age. The

philosophical notions are woven through the interpretations, illuminating the ontological nature of the phenomenon.

## **Having a Routine**

As a way of opening up talk about the everyday, participants were invited to “tell me about yesterday.” Clark’s response is offered as a rich illustration of being in the routineness of the day:

*Yesterday? Yesterday. Yesterday? My life is routine. It has got to be routine or otherwise if something happens and it’s out of routine I have got to think hard as to what I am supposed to be doing. Sunday I have got to have Sunday roast. Monday I clean the house, and so forth or otherwise I think you’d get lost. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, I usually do some gardening or I sit in the chair and read. On a Friday I go shopping and that’s another routine thing. Every Friday I go to the bank then I go shopping.*

*I have got to do it this way or otherwise the week is going to go wrong. For instance my daughter invited me over for Sunday lunch, so on Monday it was Sunday, and then I had to squeeze Sunday and Monday into Monday. Then it slowly adjusted and by Wednesday, alright, I am back in routine again. I had to rearrange my whole week because I just live a routine.*

*Yesterday was a routine. I did a bit of gardening down there. What else? What else? What else did I do yesterday? No I just did the gardening; then the car wanted filling up, I filled that up, posted a cheque to the insurance company, then my daughter Mary came over. We play scrabble. Then usually I watch whatever is on the television. Today has been the same. No, the days are more or less the same; they are all more or less the same. Well as I say life is boring. There are no highlights [Clark, 89].*

*Yesterday?* Clark sets out to recount his *yesterday* but its detail is elusive. Yesterday simply went by; it has been and gone. ‘Yesterday’ types of days pass by barely noticed. The things which are ordinarily of concern are simply attended to. ‘Yesterday days’ are unexceptional and therefore they are unmemorable. As he talks, Clark noticeably moves between telling about his typical day and being in yesterday. This phenomenon showed in numerous conversations when participants spoke of the usual occurrences. Yet phenomenally, events are understood to be “thisly” (Harman, 2007, p. 28). That is, yesterday was this particular day and no other day. However, Clark’s story suggests ‘this’ one day is so like most other days that the ‘thisly-ness’ appears to reside within the generalised experience itself.

So Clark appeals to knowing that his *life is routine* and thus draws on what he *usually* does in order to describe his yesterday. Life as routine speaks of a comfortable mode of being in the everyday. And Clark says he has *got to have Sunday roast* on Sunday. The ‘got to’ brings into words the requisite nature of being in a routine. For Clark, routineness is a compelling and necessary way of being in his day. Thus, it has the character of fallenness; evoking a sense of order and certainty. Fallenness, in the mode of living a routine, is a drifting along in the world (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

The requisite nature of having a routine is further illuminated as Clark tells of knowing his week will *go wrong* when his routine is disrupted. His working to recover routineness highlights the uncomfortableness in being out of routine. The falling *back in routine by Wednesday* speaks of Clark’s return to a ‘drifting along’ in his everyday. Hence, routineness means not *getting lost*. Here, ‘not getting lost’ suggests knowing what day it is and what is ordinarily done that day. However, having a routine is not in itself a showing of being aged. Interpreting the notion further, Clark’s days now come and go without the temporal markers which were there for much of his life. At other times, other compelling concerns would have defined the shape of his day and week; such as being at war, being at work, and being a husband and father. In being aged, any one day can be like every other day. Hence, having a routine is Clark’s means of staying temporally situated in his everyday and within his world.

Interestingly, Clark says *you'd get lost* rather than I'd get lost. In this way, the 'you' points to the 'everydayness' of being in a routine. Rather than owning up to getting lost in the everyday as something of his own doing, Clark generalises the notion. The 'you' of getting lost speaks of falling into a routine as just being how it is. Drawing on the philosophical underpinnings, fallenness in the everyday mostly has "the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the 'they'" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 220). It is a going along with how things generally are, showing a tendency for conforming. Thus Clark's saying *you'd get lost* suggests he assumes others, or 'they' in general, would get lost in the same way.

Furthermore, Clark's uneasiness with being *out of routine* is highlighted by his saying he has to *think hard*. Being out of routine is disjunctive; it is being dislodged or separated from what is usually there in the everyday. Drifting along is not possible. His words disclose an unwelcome uncomfortableness as the typical flow of his week is lost. Interpreted in the context of Heidegger's (1927/1962) notion of 'Being-in,' 'being out' of routine has the contrasting character of everyday unfamiliarity. But by Wednesday, Clark alludes to having recovered the familiar. He said *yesterday was a routine and today has been the same*. Tomorrow, the already-there habitual tasks await him. Thus, "that which will come tomorrow...is 'eternally yesterday's'" (Heidegger, p. 422). For the most part "'it's all one and the same', the accustomed, the 'like yesterday, so today and tomorrow'" (Heidegger, p. 423). Hence, having a routine is predominantly being in the present, but also shows the interplay of being, at the same time, in the past and the future.

Paradoxically, in the comfortableness of his routine, with his weeks being *all more or less the same*, Clark says his *life is boring*. His words unveil the tediousness of being in an ever-repeating pattern. Heidegger (1927/1962) proposes that being comfortable in the everyday is recognised by having a "state-of-mind which consists of a pallid lack of mood. In everydayness Dasein can undergo dull 'suffering', [and] sink away in the dullness of it" (Heidegger, p. 422). Consistent with this interpretation, for Clark, the dullness of having a routine means being in his everyday has *no highlights*.

In a supplementary way, Frank illuminates something further of the complex character of routineness:

*Yesterday? It was Tuesday wasn't it yesterday? Huh, I've forgotten what I did yesterday. I will come back to it. I have a routine in the morning, so this morning I got up and did routine things; I had breakfast, cleaned my teeth, made the bed, shaved, and went back in the kitchen. Yesterday morning would start off the same. My routine is important because I know where everything is. Now if I go up to my daughter's I'm living from a carry bag or a suitcase and I forget to do this, or I forget to do that. It's nice for a change but I come back and I am back into a routine. You do this and you do that. Your body knows what to do [Frank, 97].*

Here, Frank's 'yesterday' story articulates how his everyday *routine is important*. Its essentialness is uncovered in his saying he knows *where everything is* and his *body knows what to do*. Thus, Frank's description points to routineness as an embodied experience rather than a conceptual activity. It speaks of being in the everyday as characterised by a uniquely personal rhythm and flow. So although Frank talks about 'knowing,' it is not in the way of merely holding a theoretical structure of his day in his mind or recalling the factual sequence of his routine. In its embodiment, his knowing is a contextualised, integrated experience of Being-in-the-world. Accordingly, Frank describes his forgetting *to do this or that* amid a contextual unfamiliarity. His words point to this way of knowing as only revealing itself when it is not there. Phenomenally, "it often takes *strangeness* to make us more alert to everydayness" (Harman, 2007, p. 35). In other words, Frank's lived experience of his usual everyday routine is taken-for-granted and un-noticed until it is broken down by being in an unfamiliar space (Leonard, 1989). Being at his daughter's place lets Frank's embodied knowing, his intuitive way of going about his everyday, be seen. As with Clark, Frank's having a routine brings a structure into his day which is otherwise deficient of the

used-to-be-there temporal markers. Having a routine opens up and eases the way for getting things done. Time passes with having something to do.

## **Having Something to Do**

Since his wife died three years ago Curly has lived on his own in a downstairs half of the house. He spoke of being taken to do his shopping several times a week. Otherwise, at 97, Curly's everyday is ordinarily a being at home. His story touches upon something which all participants spoke to; the importance of having something to do. Curly said:

*Monday was just another one of those days as far as I was concerned. I usually rise about 7, 7:30, make myself a cup of tea, and listen to the 8 o'clock news. Then I have my breakfast, wash the dishes, and do whatever is necessary. Fortunately I have a lady who comes in once a week to do the housekeeping; but otherwise the laundry I do, the ironing, everything. If I have no odd jobs to do around the place then I will start reading. Or I play patience. I played a game or two of patience yesterday; I always find it interesting. Then I read the paper and I made lunch.*

*I always have a nap every afternoon for an hour and a half, or a couple of hours, which I think is very beneficial. So yesterday, after my nap I made a cup of tea and started preparation for my evening meal. Then I played some music. I play a lot of music. I am very fond of music. I have a whole lot of CDs, tapes and records; some old records; plenty of them. At five o'clock I had a glass of sherry, which is another thing that I think is good for me, and at six o'clock I listened to the news on the television.*

*I am never at a loss; I can always turn to do something. I mean, I must be doing something whether it is crosswords, reading, listening to music, or patience. I am not one to sit down and do nothing; that is no good. I don't think one thing is more important, I think they are all important because they are things that I like*

*and it's part of my life. It's when you don't do anything that things seem to pall [Curly, 97].*

Curly describes his Monday in terms of what he did, or often in terms of what he ordinarily does. Like Clark's story earlier, Curly moves between describing being in this day and his usual everyday. He tells of doing *whatever is necessary* and of doing *everything*, apart from the *housekeeping*. A situated interpretation of doing 'necessary' things hints at Curly's doing the things which enable him to be, and to remain, where he is. Doing the necessary sustains his mode of being at home and going about his day in ways he is comfortable with. He tells of doing the necessary first. In being aged, Curly points to the importance of keeping up with what is required to live alone, as he does. Also, the indispensable things which are always there bring a temporal structure into his everyday. That is, by getting his *breakfast, lunch and evening meal*, already Curly has something to do at the beginning, the middle and the end of his everyday.

He tells of doing other things because he *thinks* they are *good for him*. Thus having his *nap* after lunch and his *glass of sherry at five o'clock* fell into their natural temporal place on Monday, as they do every other day. In saying these things 'are good' for him, Curly reveals a sense of being responsible and accountable for his present circumstances as well as doing things for the sake of his future health and wellbeing. Being aged may bring into sharper focus the salience of doing what is 'good' for carrying on in life. The potential consequences are great.

Describing his morning, Curly mentions how *if* he has *no odd jobs* to do, *then* he does other things. Again his words point to being primarily concerned with doing the mundane, necessary things first. The words uncover a determination, a resoluteness, in pursuing a preferred way of being in his day. Ontologically, Heidegger (1927/1962) interprets resoluteness as a disclosing. It is "taking a stand for oneself as a certain kind of person" (Crowe, 2006, p. 189). The things Curly concerns himself with seem to say things about who he is as a person in his own right. Then as he goes on to describe the rest of his Monday, Curly reveals the things he *likes* to do. Engaging his *interests* fills up the remainder of

his day. Interpreted philosophically, “Dasein’s facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in....[such as] having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it” (Heidegger, p. 83). Curly’s everyday is an engaging in multiple interests wherein he suggests *one thing is not more important* than the others. Yet one seems to stand out; his being *very fond of music*. His words suggest music evokes deep enjoyment and therefore is the thing which is most enriching to being in his everyday. Music draws his passion. It reaches back to his past. It carries him into his future. Curly had described his parents and siblings as ‘musical.’ He grew up with music around him. The music of the past carries on with him.

From what he describes, Curly’s interests engage his thinking, his imagining and his being interested in the world. Thus, as his ‘physical-ness’ diminishes, he finds restful ways of engaging. He is sitting playing *patience*, doing *crosswords*, *reading*, *listening to music* and watching the *television news*. Curly lives alone so engages himself in solitary ways. Looking at the rhythm of doing things in his everyday, Curly appears to flow between being up and moving about, doing the necessary, and sitting serenely engaging his interests. It suggests, at 97, he is thoughtful in crafting an everyday characterised by balancing the embodied demands of his efforts. Curly lives a productive and restorative, embodied rhythm.

As he reflects on his day, Curly proclaims he is *never at a loss*. Being at a loss would be not having something to *turn to*, or not knowing what to do. But Curly’s experience is of always having something to do. In saying he *must be doing something* he further discloses a felt necessity for keeping busy with things; for making certain he has things to be concerned with. Thus, being in his everyday is in a mode of ‘engagedness’ for his own sake. In himself, he ‘knows’ that always having something to do is a safeguard against things *seeming to pall*. “When one is wholly devoted to something and ‘really’ busies oneself with it....[it is] a letting-things-be-involved” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 405). Curly ‘lets’ each activity be involved in his day; he lets each one matter.

Just as Curly mentioned his fondness of music, frequently the participants spoke of having one thing which aroused their passion. Being in the everyday was more than merely having ‘something’ to do. The following series of brief anecdotes illustrate the essential-ness of having a strong interest:

*I am still able to take a big part in music. Music is still my main thing...I do like my music; I think I would miss that as much as anything. Yes I would hate not to have music. What else is there for me [Madge, 95]?*

*I am mad about art. That's my big thing. Well, I went to Elam in 1940 and I have always painted...No, I get great joy in painting but I haven't done any for really the last five years. I am concentrating on my grandkids. Now I do and I don't paint [Margaret, 80].*

*I have always gardened. I suppose you would almost say gardening's my greatest interest; and re-rooting things. It's just the fun of producing these things. It gives me something to do, not chucking everything away. If I couldn't garden, ahhhhh, then I would start to get old...Oh yes. I would be lost without the garden [Frank, 97].*

*I always go to darts no matter what. I have never turned darts down...I don't know what I would do with myself if I had to give up darts. No I wouldn't want to give up darts [May, 77].*

*I have been writing quite a lot since I was at university. I really haven't stopped trying to clean up all the stuff I have written. My girls sometimes say how are you going to go to bed tonight with all that on your bed? Last night I just wrote in bed where it is warm until about, I think it was 3 o'clock when I put the light out. Time doesn't mean anything to me. I just worked as long as I felt I could and when I got tired I just reached over and put the light out and*

*went to sleep. I am hoping that I can keep up the writing [Merrill, 89].*

The ‘one thing’ is variously spoken of as being *my main thing; my big thing;* and *my greatest interest.* Each person points to the one pursuit as reflecting an essential-ness of who they are. In each situation, the one thing shows as an enduring interest over time. Engaging in this one pursuit shows ‘who I have been,’ ‘who I am now’ and ‘who I will be.’ The engaging illuminates the temporal unity of past, present and future. Thus, in their own way, each person brings into words, I am a musician; I am an artist; I am a gardener; I am a darts player and I am a writer. The hermeneutic ‘as’ is in play. That is, how the one pursuit is talked about and persistently referred back to “lets something be seen as something” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 57). The words assert one ‘as’—the one thing *as ‘my greatest interest.’* Whereas interpretation reveals a primordial ‘as’—the one thing *as being ‘me;’ I am this person.* Margaret’s words disclose something of this phenomenon as she said *now I do and I don’t paint.*

Collectively the words illuminate an intensity of emotions; *I would hate not to have music; I get great joy in painting; I have never turned darts down;* and *I am hoping that I can keep up the writing.* Engaging in and caring about doing the one pursuit evokes a deep, intense sense of being in the world. Again the words ‘I have never,’ ‘I get,’ and ‘I am hoping’ reveal a temporal unity in doing what matters. What is brought into language shows being connected to the past, being fully engaged in the present and being hopeful toward the future. Having the one thing that gives *great joy* is a reason for being in the everyday. Even though Margaret says *I haven’t done any for really the last five years,* she is still a painter. The possibility of painting is still there in her everyday. In being aged, while other interests or abilities may change, or be lost, having the one engaging pursuit seems to deliver a sense of stability to who I am and what I do.

Keeping a focus on the temporal interplay, the next section uncovers a further dimension of being in the everyday.

## Having the Past in the Present

Throughout the research conversations I was drawn to notice how often talk of things in the present led to the past. ‘What is’ and ‘what has been’ seemed to naturally come together in the stories. To illustrate, during the war years Merrill had worked for the allied forces office in Noumea, living in a garage with the French. Her story began elsewhere:

*Every now and again when there is nobody here I sit and have a tune on the piano and think, oh yes my fingers are still working. A couple of days ago I played. I happened to be coming back from watering my plants and I thought, oh, I haven’t had a tune for a while. I heard Denise singing a piece the other night; she was singing Buttons and Bows which we used to sing years ago. And I thought I wonder if I can still play it, and I sat down to have a go. My fingers aren’t as supple somehow. Well they are still supple but they are not as accurate. I can’t play the octave as easily so I missed out a few notes here and there.*

*I played for the men at the war sometimes so I used to play a lot. The French used to get me to play Chopin as I had a winter learning that music. At the war I also had lessons from a French lady who taught at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. And I taught my daughter to Grade III before sending her for classes. I don’t play as much now [Merrill, 89].*

Merrill tells of *happening to be coming back from watering her plants* and, in passing the piano, of thinking she *hadn’t played for a while*. In saying ‘happening’ she speaks of going into the room not intending to play, but of finding herself there and being drawn to play. The moment simply captured her. Yet the tune for *Buttons and Bows* was already there for the playing. In *hearing* her daughter singing and remembering *singing it years ago* the tune was already stirring in her thoughts. And Merrill tells of *missing out a few notes here and there* yet she shows no concern for her fingers not being as accurate as they once

were. Instead, Merrill is entangled in the memories the tune evokes rather than being attentive to reproducing the notes on the keyboard.

As Merrill talks of playing *a couple of days ago*, her story moves from being there, *having a go* at remembering the tune, to remembering events from her history. She tells of *playing for the men at the war* and of the French getting *her to play Chopin*. In this way, Merrill's story reveals her thoughts moving from the tune itself to 'being in' the era when Buttons and Bows was something they sang. In the thrownness of the moment, her past is there with her. Her past is in her present. The anecdote illuminates how seamlessly Merrill's thoughts move between then, seventy years ago, and now. Her memories of playing during the war are already with her as she sits to play Buttons and Bows. The tune seamlessly connects the two occurrences in time.

Although the wartime events are long since past, the experience is still with Merrill. This does not suggest living in the past but of the past remaining present. Phenomenally, “‘the past’ belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; it belonged to the events of that time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand ‘now’” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 430). In other words, Merrill's memories exist as a remnant of events in her history. It means the memorable events of times gone by are not entirely ‘gone.’ In this sense, history is “that which is past, but which nevertheless is still having effects” (Heidegger, p. 430). Through remembering, the historical is still present-at-hand, influencing being in the everyday.

Interpreting across the participants' anecdotes, memories, as fragments of history, may be an announcing of being aged. Christina, at 93, said *I do like being able to remember things...and I always remember that when we had porridge for breakfast it had salt on it instead of sugar, and I thought that is a funny thing to remember*. And Curly alluded to memories as having a greater presence in the context of being aged. He said *I think about the past quite a lot strangely enough. I was thinking the other day, going back to when I was at school, remembering the names of all the teachers, and that is a long time ago. It is just something that goes through your mind. And I think about the times I was in the army. The*

*thoughts can happen at any time...it is interesting because they were the good times. These are not good times, the good times are gone.* Thus, at 97, Curly's present-at-hand memories are those of significant events in his history.

Remembering the poignant, both joyous and painful, prevents them being lost to the past. Heidegger (1927/1962) refers to such events as “‘epoch-making’ [in that they] determine ‘a future’ ‘in the present’” (p. 430). The remembering points to the people, the things and the events which endure.

Furthermore, Heidegger (1927/1962) proposes that Dasein is ‘primarily historical.’ That is, we “exist temporally in so primordial a manner” that Being-in-the-world is essentially a “Being-in-time” (Heidegger, p. 433). Accordingly, events are “just one more single ‘Experience’ in the sequence of the whole connectedness of our Experiences” (Heidegger, p. 439). Interpreted in this context, memories exist as a part of the whole life experience; unifying past, present and future in an uninterrupted flow of life events. Being aged may mean that memories of ‘epoch-making’ events hold a more salient place within the everyday. This may be particularly so when change and loss is experienced. Accordingly, memories may have a stabilising affect; evoking a sense of constancy into the being of being aged.

Being-in-the-world is a situated experience. Hence changes and losses are always contextualised occurrences. Situated-ness means the possibilities for everyday engagement are revealed or concealed; opened up or “dimmed down” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 234).

## **Being Situated in the Everyday**

Florence and her husband are both 90. Three years ago they sold the family home of 43 years and moved into a two-bedroom apartment on the sixth floor of a multi-story block. Florence said:

*On Sunday I had a lie in until about 11 o'clock and got up and showered and got dressed. I don't get up early now because the day is too long and my leg swells too much. My whole way of life has changed since we have been over here. I sit here and think,*

*now what will I do? Ernest spends most of his time in bed so I read. I love reading, so on Sunday I read until my eyes were sore then I put the book down and turned the television on which didn't help them. So that was like a typical day, just staying at home.*

*I am sorry we gave up the old house. It was a beautiful old house but we couldn't keep up with the repairs; it needed painting and other things. I thought it would be a good idea to sell and get a little apartment but I realise now I should have gone to the bank and got a mortgage and done the house up. Instead of that I sold it. Ernest and I are both sorry we sold, we often talk about it.*

*There is nothing to do here; not that I could do it. But there is nothing to do here. I sometimes say I have lived too long because I get bored, bored to tears [Florence, 90].*

Florence sets out to describe last Sunday as being an everyday type of day for her. Suddenly she announces that her *whole way of life is changed*. Her everyday *over here*, in the apartment, is not just different she hints at it being entirely altered. She reveals an experience of her everyday now as being unrecognisable from when she was 'in' the *old house*. The contextually-bound nature of Florence's 'thereness' shows itself. She tells of being in a day which is *too long* and of *sitting and thinking* about what to do. The newness and uncomplicated-ness of the space around her means Florence experiences a deficiency of things to concern herself with.

Thus as she reflects on her day now, Florence tells of being *sorry they gave up the old house*. Her words disclose a sense of having surrendered to something; of being regretful for what was given up. In saying they *couldn't keep up with the repairs* her words speak of having felt overwhelmed by the contextual demands of being in the old house. Being there meant there was always the call for something to be done. Her words reflect wanting to be without the demanding-ness of living in the house rather than wanting to be without the *beautiful old house* itself. As a consequence of giving it up, Florence characterises her everyday now as having *nothing to do*. She expresses a dullness evoked through being in a

place which is deficient of concern. Being in the apartment ‘dims down’ Florence’s possibilities for engaging in her everyday. She is *bored to tears*. Being bored further reduces the possibility of Florence seeing things which could be done. Yet the ‘dimming down’ is not necessarily attributed entirely to ‘being in’ the apartment. ‘Not being in’ the old house means she no longer has around her the things which draw forth her memories of people and events. Not being there suggests being displaced and feeling disconnected. Hence Florence may be closed off to being involved through failing to see the things which might otherwise be there for her to do. It is a mode of ‘not letting’ things matter to her.

In contrast is Ella’s story. She and her daughter Rosemarie live together in a rented, downstairs half of a house. Ella tells of being in her everyday following surgery for a hip joint replacement:

*Since I came out of hospital Rosemarie has been teaching the children at dance class and she had about 40 yards of pink denim given to her which she used for all the costumes. She made the six girls’ skirts, each with different black lace, and I ironed them all. See, if anything is going on like that, all of a sudden something happens and I have got something to do. I will just show you the skirts. I won’t pull them all out. They looked beautiful. I ironed them.*

*You see these things come up, whereas if I was in a home or even with my other daughter, this would never come up. What would I do if I was with Rhonda? She would hardly allow me in the kitchen to begin with. What would I do? With Rosemarie, she has an idea and I can do it. So these things come up; it is something different. Well, each day I can do more. It is not that I am longing to do things, but I don’t want to be sitting and doing nothing and thinking about nothing [Ella, 93].*

In this anecdote, Ella tells of Rosemarie’s making six skirts for the children’s dance class. Her voice is full of joy as she pronounces that she *ironed*

*them all.* In the midst of talking, Ella notices how being with Rosemarie means *all of a sudden something happens* in her day. Unexpectedly, something presents itself and she has *got something to do*. Rosemarie invites her mother's involvement. The situation holds an expectancy which lets Ella become involved. Being there means Ella is opened up to possibilities in her day. The 'there' is not the place itself, in a spatial sense, but "the space it opens up and illuminates" (Inwood, 1999, p. 42). In other words, the context itself is revealing, lighting up possibilities for engaging. On this occasion, Ella's 'thereness' meant the ironing, which was not there before, *came up* for her. Her story uncovers being in the 'throw' of her everyday. The new possibilities come as a surprise as if "the environment announces itself afresh" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 105). Amid the thrownness of living with Rosemarie, Ella's everyday is a falling into doing things which are newly revealed.

Reflectively, Ella comments that *each day she can do more*. In saying this, she points to being 'there' as hastening her recovery. She wonders how things might be for her in a different context; like being *in a home* or *with Rhonda*. She anticipates other situations as not letting her be involved; as closing off possibilities. Her words are forward-looking. Ontologically, she is not merely there doing what is thrown up. She 'exists' ahead of herself. As she finishes telling her story Ella wraps one of the skirts about her and twirls around to show off the flare of the hemline. As she turns, a few steps of the maxina come back to her and she begins to dance. She laughs. She is dancing, remembering and imagining. The event unveils Ella's present, past and future coming together. In her 'thereness' she is opened up to 'doing more.' Being involved in making the children's dance costumes brings a sense of purpose into the everyday. It is about making a contribution to others or to something beyond the self.

## **Having a Purpose**

Making a contribution to the wider community particularly showed in conversations with Maori elders. Matelot's story illustrates this:

*A good day is when I have got something to do or somebody rings me up to do something. Because I am a kaumataua, I go and do*

*those things. It is landed on my shoulders. For example, on Thursday I went with some ladies to Te Awamutu for a powhiri.<sup>13</sup> It was for their project teaching the young children how to talk English. I hadn't thought about what I was going to say, I waited until I got there and then I got up and said what I had to say.*

*I was looking forward to it but I was disappointed when I got there. They were so casual with the powhiri. It belittles what the Maori used to do. When he was doing his karakia<sup>14</sup> for instance he was scratching his nose and bending down and picking stuff off the floor at the same time, and I thought God Almighty. It made me angry but at the same time I could see that he was only stuck there to see the job out. And he was only a young joker, so if I had have growled at him it wouldn't have made any difference anyway. But I was angry with the wananga<sup>15</sup> for handing him that. They didn't have the right people there.*

*But if I couldn't go as kaumatua, well I suppose that is not the day I am looking forward to actually. No. I would just sit at home I suppose and think about what is going to happen and that is about all [Matelot, 74].*

Matelot tells of it being a *good day* when the call *to do something* comes because *he is a kaumatua*. In doing so, he communicates the depth of respect he is afforded by the Maori community. Being a kaumatua is not achieved merely by being aged; it reveals Matelot as knowledgeable and practised in Maori language, customs and rules. The words point to Matelot's being in the everyday as anticipating the call to perform ceremonial functions which are the reserve of kaumatua. Through saying *it is landed on his shoulders*, he signifies an

<sup>13</sup> Powhiri is a formal welcome (Moorfield, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Karakia is a prayer or incantation (Walker, 1990)

<sup>15</sup> Wananga means knowledge or learning (Walker, 1990); used here meaning a place of learning.

observance of the customary passing on of kaumatua functions. Those who have been before him have handed down responsibilities to him. So, by saying he goes *to do those things* Matelot speaks of a sense of duty in making himself available to be called upon. He discloses the acceptableness of the responsibility settling upon his shoulders. In signifying a good day as one in which somebody rings him, Matelot indicates being in the ‘mode of possibility’ in his everyday as kaumatua. This mode takes precedence over other things within his everyday world.

Philosophically the notion of mana<sup>16</sup> Maori motuhake<sup>17</sup> offers an understanding of Matelot’s having a greater purpose in his everyday. It has its foundations in Maori resistance to full assimilation as a colonised people. Through the twentieth century, new urban marae were established as Maori migrated from their rural homelands to work in the industrialising cities. “Accordingly, for landless Maori, the marae was their remaining turangawaewae<sup>18</sup> on which to hang their identity as the indigenous people” (Walker, 1990, p. 187). Contemporary affiliation with marae and other Maori associations perpetuates traditional knowledge and customs by way of passing responsibilities on to kaumatua and kuia, the male and female elders (Walker). And as Matelot talks, he naturally weaves Maori language into his story spoken primarily in English. Walker suggests the upholding of cultural difference, such as through their native language, “impelled the Maori to dwell in the dual world of biculturalism” (p. 198). Thus, through his storytelling, Matelot reveals a fluency in moving between two worlds.

In his recent example of being kaumatua at the wananga, Matelot tells of being there before knowing *what he had to say*. Thus he uncovers a practised wisdom. He ‘knows’ that the right things to do and say will be there for him in the event. The ‘thrownness’ of being in the moment means the words which will carry his message forward are always already there as he *gets up* to speak. His Maori history comes before him. Ontologically, Matelot’s standing and speaking is then

<sup>16</sup> Mana is the Maori word meaning “authority, power, prestige” (Walker, 1990, p. 296).

<sup>17</sup> Motuhake in Maori means “discrete, separate, independent” (Walker, 1990, p. 296).

<sup>18</sup> Turangawaewae means “standing in the tribe” (Walker, 1990, p. 298).

a being in his past, present and future. And in saying the powhiri's casualness *belittles what the Maori used to do* he speaks of being there, not as an individual carrying out a job, but as representing Maoridom and its traditional customs. In the same way, the young Maori man's mistakes were not seen to be his own failings but those of the people who passed the responsibility on to him. In closing, Matelot tells of not *looking forward to* a time of not being able to *go as kaumatua*. He emphasises the purposefulness experienced in contributing as a Maori elder to something so much greater than himself.

Similarly, participants with strong church affiliations revealed a purposefulness in giving to the church and its community. Mary's story highlights this:

*I do all the painting of the cards for the church because it helps them, because cards are expensive. I am the one at church who sends all the cards out for births, marriages, deaths, condolences; everything. They just ring me up 'will you send so and so a card; she is sick.' I have got them all ready and I keep a record so if I have sent a crocus to someone I don't send the same card next time. I have been sending the cards since 1979 but I didn't start painting them until a few years later. I have done probably over 600 in the last few years.*

*They are all different types. Most of these are roses, these ones are all different types of yellow flowers, and then these are all blue ones, crocuses and things like that. Of course for condolences I do something whiteish. If you wonder why I have got so many cards, I always have a few ready because you never know when you have to send one. And I thought, I know this sounds silly but, I would like to leave 100 when I die so they can carry on [Mary, 93].*

Mary tells of *being the one* who does *all the cards for the church* because *it helps them*. Her words, '*being the one*,' speak of being there for the good of the church. They speak of the church knowing it can rely on her contribution to its

community functions. Her unfailing giving to the greater purpose is further unveiled as Mary talks of having been the *painter and sender of cards* for close to thirty years. Being there for the church shows in her having the cards *all ready* for the moment she is *just rung up*. Hence, as with Matelot, Mary reveals being in her everyday as being there to be called upon.

In the midst of telling her story, Mary brings out a large bundle of her cards. She sets about showing the different types, each with a different coloured rose or flower. She comments *of course for condolences* she does *something whiteish*; her words pointing to the thoughtfulness behind making each card and the message it carries to the receiver. By way of Mary's doing, the church shows its parishioners it cares. And in saying *she would like to leave a 100 cards when she dies*, Mary unveils not only having a purposefulness to being in her everyday, she illuminates an anticipating of possibilities beyond her being in the world.

On the other hand, Margaret's purposefulness shows in her contributing to the family. She was the youngest non-Maori participant and had retired about 10 years ago, not long before the birth of her first grandchild:

*Being a grandmother did take over my other interests, yes, I just love it. My son-in-law goes away a lot and I just love helping my daughter with the children. When he goes away, and some weekends, I help out. The grandchildren are now 9 and 7. There is always something; I do their mending or anything like that. That's what I do.*

*The week before last Michael's new trousers were too long; so I took them up, and there was something else I did too. And the other day my daughter was doing something and I had to take Michael to swimming and that is right over the other side of town. The car knows its way there now. That's where my time goes. You see even tomorrow I have to be at my daughter's at a quarter to five to take Kathleen to dancing. See, that is tomorrow. Life's very busy [Margaret, 80].*

In this story Margaret tells of how much she *loves* to help her daughter with things for the sake of the children. Being a grandmother is spoken of as *taking over her other interests*; and of *helping* as being *what she does*. Behind the story, it is as if the ‘job of helping’ fills the everyday space created by her retirement. Her words speak of finding a greater purpose in being ‘for’ her daughter, but more specifically in being ‘for’ her grandchildren. Accordingly, Margaret indicated she *had to take* her grandson to swimming and tomorrow she *has to be* there to take her granddaughter to dancing. Her words signifying a mode of being obligated to do what she does. They speak of a compelling pull toward being relied upon for her contribution to the family. As such, Margaret’s being grandmother is about having a greater, intergenerational purpose. The needs of others ‘call’ to her.

Frank’s story, however, shows a different mode of purposefulness. As one of the eldest participants, he tells of making a commitment to being there in the future:

*I grew a pineapple which took 6 years from when I planted the top to when we ate the fruit. We ate the fruit January 2003. I replanted the top of it and if that one takes 6 years then it means I eat it January 2009. So I have put on the label the date I planted it, and the words “I will eat you January 2009.” So in January 2009, I am going to eat my pineapple. I will probably make a pavlova with chopped pineapple and whipped cream [Frank, 97].*

Frank alludes to his purpose in saying he *is going to* eat his pineapple *in January 2009*. The date means Frank would be in his 101<sup>st</sup> year of life. In recording his intention on the plant’s label, Frank declares a commitment to his future possibilities. He creates his own need to be there in January 2009. Seeing out the ripening pineapple is a purpose for continuing to live. His story is congruent with Heidegger’s (1927/1962) notion of being as existence. “As long as [Dasein] is’, right to its end, it comports itself towards its potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger, p. 279). Thus in committing to a future event, Frank’s purpose shows as being ‘ahead of himself’ in his everyday.

Interpreted within the context of being aged, being in a mode of possibility may have the character of tentativeness as the natural end of life is anticipated. Further to this, the possibilities for everyday engagement may show a ‘trivialness’ when previously ‘significant’ purposes such as providing and caring for one’s family or spouse, are lost. However, while having a purpose is a ‘being toward future possibilities,’ what is done to achieve them is grounded in the present; in being entangled in the everyday.

## A Reflection

In this first of four findings chapters I aimed to make present the anecdotes and hermeneutic interpretations which circled around textual expressions of the mundane, always-there things in the everyday. From all the relevant anecdotes on offer, those most poignant were chosen to illustrate the understandings described. A way of ‘pointing to’ the evocative guided the hermeneutic interpretation.

‘Hearing’ the messages in the text turned me to ‘listening’ philosophically. Two overarching philosophies guided a deeper understanding of the text; Heidegger’s notion of Being-in as a dwelling in the everyday and the Maori notion of mana motuhake as a dwelling in the world of traditional Maori knowledge.

Furthermore, Heidegger’s notions of fallenness, existence and thrownness enriched the interpretation of the temporal nature of being aged. Phenomenally, being in the everyday is about the usual manner of being engaged in doing. Ways of being in the everyday illuminate who the person is and the complex interplay of their past, present and future. The usualness of being in the day overshadows being aged.

F a l l i n g

**Thrown**

**Existing**

The fallenness, thrownness and existence  
of being aged.

Fallenness is a falling into the  
day, compellingly entangled in  
everyday things; yesterdays, as today, as tomorrow.  
Strangeness illuminating the routineness, a  
being ‘me’ in what ‘I do.’

Thrownness in the everyday, the past  
thrown up, present-at-hand. Remembering  
playing Chopin, eating salted porridge, being at school  
oh so many years ago, seeming like yesterday.  
Connecting life’s wholeness,  
being ‘in’ ‘my life.’

Being there, the thereness sometimes  
lighting things up, as a letting things be  
involved, passing the day away. Sometimes  
dimming things down, as a letting potentialities  
recede into the shadows.

Existence is a being toward  
possibilities, being for something beyond the  
immediateness of the everyday. Finding  
a purpose in being for  
‘my people’ ‘my church’ ‘my family.’

Being aged is a being in the everyday. A being all  
together in  
the present, the past and the future.

## Chapter Seven: Being with Others

Woven through the participants' talk about the everyday were stories about people; mothers, fathers, siblings, partners, children and friends. This seems a natural occurrence. By virtue of being human, we live in a world connected by social structures and social relations. Whether one has lived to seventy-one or to ninety-seven, so many life events are shared with others. Living in advanced age means many of those moments were with those who have now passed away. In the talking I was drawn to notice the variable, everyday ways the elders spoke about the people 'in' their lives. Thus I bring together in this chapter anecdotes which illuminate different modes of being with others in the context of being aged.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

The human entity's co-existence in the world is fundamental to Heidegger's (1927/1962) ontological description of the meaning of being. Accordingly, "the world of Dasein is a *with-world*" (Heidegger, p. 155). Being-in-the-world is always a mode of 'Being-with-Others.' It is a "basic state of Dasein by which every mode of its Being gets co-determined" (Heidegger, p. 153). Heidegger's use of the title case for 'Other' signifies a particular meaning. Instead of 'Other' referring to everyone else in general, Heidegger means those who are encountered in some way in the everyday. 'Others' are those to whom one is closest in some way. Ontologically, 'Being-in-the-world-with-Others' may mean experiencing common concerns, 'engaging-with' in everyday matters and working together towards future possibilities.

Even when not in the company of others, Being-in-the-world always has a relational quality. Thus, "Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived. Even Dasein's Being-alone is Being-with in the world" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 156-157). That is,

‘Being-alone’ is still a mode of ‘Being-with,’ albeit a deficient mode. But here a deficiency does not necessarily mean being alone is an incomplete or impoverished way of Being-in-the-world. It simply refers back to the relational quality of human co-existence. It implies a person is never fully ‘alone’ in the world. Others are always ‘there’ in a contextual way. Conversely, a person can be in the presence of others yet still experience Being-alone. In this sense, Being-alone is interpreted as a mode of Being-with characterised by indifference and a lack of concern.

Contextual understandings of Being-with will be influenced by a peoples’ world view. For Maori, membership of the extended family and tribe is thus interpreted as a societal mode of Being-with-Others. According to Maori customs the whanau or multi-generational family is the fundamental unit in Maori society. Over succeeding generations the whanau grew to form a sub-tribe, being related back to a common ancestor (Walker, 1990). Hence, in Maoridom, attachment to generations of family and the land settled by ancestors are deeply held sentiments, essential to wellbeing.

In bringing forward anecdotes illustrating modes of Being-with in advanced age, historical backgrounds are at times offered as a way of contextualising the text.

## **Being-with as Belonging**

Pani’s life story may echo that of many others in his generation of Maori (Walker, 1990). There was the growing up through a time of urbanisation and Europeanisation with the suppression of Maori language and traditional ways. There was the coming through the tuberculosis epidemic and losing both parents and many relatives at a young age. There was the moving away from tribal lands and learning to make his own way in the urban world of manual labour. And there was the irregular work and financial hardship while providing for his wife and children.

Only Pani and his wife now live at home in their rented unit. It is a long way from the place his ancestors called ‘home.’ Pani tells of a journey of discovery he embarked on last year:

*I found out that I am from Tainui, that is Waikato, and Wai Poenamo, a South Island tribe. My dad was buried down at a little town there and, this is interesting, my daughter married a boy up North and she came down and she said Dad I want to go back so I know where my grandfather was buried. So they raised some money to take me back down South.*

*I hadn't been back for fifty-six years. Oh it was fantastic; we went across on the boat. It was rough and when we arrived into Picton we had to travel south to this place. It was quite late at night and we pulled up outside this house and it was straight across from the marae. I didn't even know we had a marae down there. And as we pulled up it was 10'ish at night and we saw the lights on and these people came rushing out. They introduced themselves and I knew straight away who they were; they were my relatives. And they contacted other relatives of mine and as they all arrived we ended up going to the marae.*

*What a beautiful marae. That is where my Dad is buried and that was the first time I had been there. When we went into the marae, oh it was beautiful. It is my marae, and I didn't even know I belonged to it. It was so overwhelming. I think because, for the first time, I was on the marae. They told me it was mine. When I say mine, I mean I am involved with the family.*

*More so, they were overjoyed to see me. That was the overwhelming part, and the people that came around to visit; oh I hadn't even met them. But they knew who I was. Well it is just amazing. My son and my daughter, they couldn't get over the place [Pani, 71].*

As Pani tells his story of going back to the place where his father is buried, he first goes back in history. He speaks of *finding out* that he is from the ancestral tribes of *Tainui and Wai Poenamo*. In uncovering his lineage, Pani finds out about

himself. At the age of 70, Pani knew who he was as a person, yet he did not know himself as being ‘of’ his people. His everyday disconnect-ness from his ancestral home and cultural knowledge meant he was spiritually standing apart. Yet the meaning of ‘being-with’ his people was always already there before it was opened up to him. *Straight away* he ‘knew’ the people he had never met. He already knew they *were his relatives*. In the event, Pani finds himself being with others who already know him as one ‘of’ them; just as he knows them as of being ‘of’ his family. They are forever bonded together in their common ancestry. The roots of connectedness, their belonging-ness, were always already there for them.

Pani mentions being *overwhelmed*. His words express the profoundness of his experience. They convey a sense of being engulfed; overcome by the meanings which pressed upon him. It was the powerfulness of standing on the tribal land, of being-with his ancestors and of being-with his people. Pani ‘belongs’ there. Thus, he was delivered over to the marae’s *beauty*; not merely its physical characteristics but the beauty of its meaning. Its beauty was primordially in the belonging-ness. Within Maori culture, the “carved meeting house [is] the symbol of Maori identity, mana and tribal traditions” (Walker, 1990, p. 188). So in learning the marae is ‘*mine*,’ Pani learns who he is and where he belongs. The belonging is with the land, the place and his people. Hence, Pani’s being-with ‘as belonging’ is characterised by the past, present and future. Belonging is being-with his ancestors, being-with his living relatives and as forging a future for the being-with of his descendants.

So how does this anecdote say anything about the phenomenon of being aged? Pani is a legacy of his history; of being Maori in a predominantly non-Maori world (Walker, 1990). Yet being Maori meant the gift of finding he belonged always already awaited him. Now as he goes about his everyday, in spite of being geographically distant from his ancestral home, Pani’s relational everyday is always one of being-with as belonging. In finding himself as of his people, the Being-with is always there with him in his everyday. His being aged and being Maori come together in the spiritual belonging.

## Being-with as Elder

Being Maori also showed as being at the heart of May's story of her grandchildren's unexpected visit:

*Yesterday, now what happened yesterday? Oh I had a house full of grandchildren. That's right, they all came in. They were at the school because they had a game of rugby and they all came back from there with their grandfather. He wanted to come back because he was starving, so they all came back together. I was sitting here watching TV when they came in and their grandfather said oh your mokos<sup>19</sup> are hungry. There were heaps of them, there must have been about 24 of them, and they are all my mokos.*

*Oohh, oh OK. I'll get something together. I said I will cook dinner for you to eat. That's what I was doing yesterday.*

*Well I just brought out what I had in the cupboard. I got out a big pot and I cooked six of these packet dinners which make up a lot. It didn't take long, only a couple of minutes. And they quite enjoyed it when I set my table up for them and it wasn't long after that they were all sitting down around the table. Some fitted around the table and some were sitting on the couch. There you are, there you are, and they were quite happy. They weren't worrying about the old man and me so I went out to the garage while they were all eating in here and when I came back in they had cleaned up and everything. Oh they were rubbing their tummies.*

*I felt good actually. I felt lovely knowing that all my mokos were all satisfied, oh thank goodness. But I did feel aroha<sup>20</sup> for them because I didn't know what they were supposed to eat over there*

<sup>19</sup> Mokos is an abbreviation of mokopuna; the Maori term for grandchild or grandchildren (Moorfield, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Aroha is the Maori term meaning "love, pity, affection, concern for" (Moorfield, 1988, p. 143)

*or maybe they didn't have any money to pay for anything. I was so pleased because they all came here and I fed them and I felt proud of that. I had them all here feeding them. That's what it was.*

*Well, there might be a time when they have got a family of their own and they do the same thing as I did for them yesterday. I gave them a lesson and hopefully that will come through for them in the future. Well on the marae, for the whanau that comes in, the old people always make sure that the family has kai.<sup>21</sup> This is how we were taught [May, 77].*

May describes her yesterday which suddenly changed from one of restful solitude to having *a house full of grandchildren; all her mokos*. Amid the unexpected, May's story reveals a sure-ness in what was called for. Without hesitating she knew to *get something together* to provide for her mokopuna<sup>22</sup>. Her knowing reaches back into the past and to *how she was taught*. These teachings were not in a classroom. Her learning unfolded through being on the marae; through Being-with her Maori elders.

On the whole, May did not speak of a life steeped in traditional Maori ways. Yet she always already knew what she was called on to do in this event. Her 'Maoriness' opened the way for her to hear 'the call.' It was the call to be with her mokopuna as their elder. Thus May's preparedness for this event is situated in her ancestral past. Heidegger (1927/1962) interprets the silent call to do something as arising from one's conscience. It is an apprehending of what ought to be done. "Conscience gives us 'something' to understand; it discloses....it is revealed as a *call*....The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein" (Heidegger, p. 314). Thus, when our conscience appeals to us, it summons us and we are aroused to do something. It is a moment, often without forewarning, of "intensification" (Crowe, 2006, p. 181). The silent call evokes an 'amplification;' it lights up and clarifies what is called for. Interpreted in this

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<sup>21</sup> Kai is the Maori term for food (Moorfield, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Mokopuna means grandchild or grandchildren (Moorfield, 1988)

context, May hears the call of ‘how’ to be with her mokopuna as their elder and as an elder Maori woman. The deeply held understandings of ‘how to be’ as elder in this circumstance are disclosed and make their appeal to her. In this way, “the call comes *from [her]* and yet *from beyond [her]*” (Heidegger, p. 320).

*Thank goodness* May says in knowing she heard and measured up to the call. She fed *all her mokos*, and she saw them *rubbing their tummies* in satisfaction. May searches for words to express the deep fulfilment she in turn experienced. She speaks of *feeling good, feeling lovely* and of *feeling proud*. May’s repetitiveness discloses the salience of this event for her as grandmother; as Maori elder. Her proudness does not arise from arrogance or being self-gratified. May’s proudness is in her knowing she followed her elders’ teachings and served an ancestral tradition. She experiences a sense of fulfilment. In turn, her ancestors would be proud of her. And her proudness is in *giving them*, her grandchildren, *a lesson*. Looking to Maori customs, male and female elders in a family group “were the storehouses of knowledge, the minders and mentors of children” (Walker, 1990, p. 63). Accordingly, elders played a crucial role in their grandchildren’s upbringing including their learning about customary ways. Thus May’s being-with as elder is in her past, present and future. The always already there understandings meant May simply went about providing for her visitors, her mokopuna, while at the same time showing the way for *them in the future*. In the event, some of the threads of the past are drawn forward, passing on the potential for the ancestral ways to be taken up and practised by her descendants.

While being an elder opened the way for May’s being-with her grandchildren, being aged can also close down previously familiar ways of being with others.

## **Being-with as Carer**

Becoming a carer for an aged parent or sibling was something three of the women spoke of. Madge and her older sister, as aging spinsters, had moved into their parent’s home to care for their aged father. Later Madge became her sister’s carer. Christina had taken her father in when he became unwell in his latter years and Merrill had her mother in the family home until just before her mother died at

105 years of age. Becoming aged as a couple also came up in conversation. Having already had a spouse pass away, nine of the participants made some mention of caring for an aged partner. As Margaret talked about being a water colourist she mentioned *my husband is repeating himself. He is starting a wee bit like that. I can't paint so much with him in the house because I have got to think; watercolours especially. That's what I notice, he used to go to golf, that's when I used to paint. When he is in the house he interrupts me; it takes my mind off painting.* In saying her husband is ‘starting a wee bit like that,’ Margaret points toward a foreseeable future of being more her husband’s carer.

Meeting for the first time with Tom, he invited me to sit at the kitchen table. I soon realised why. From his chair Tom could keep an eye on Rosie, his wife, who was sitting in the sunroom. He said Rosie had dementia and was *not very good.*

*Yesterday. Wednesday. Well, I got up at about 8 o'clock and I organised Rosie's medication. She has about 12 pills for different things. What I do is I get three spoonfuls of yoghurt and I put about three or four pills in each and cover them with more yoghurt. Then I give them to Rosie. She takes them no trouble. I used to try and make her swallow them with a drink of water or tea but that didn't work. It was too frustrating so I have worked it out that I camouflage them and she just swallows it.*

*So I gave her her medication first then I came out to the kitchen and made the cup of tea and toast, one piece of toast each, that's all we want. I took Rosie's to her in the bed and I came back out and stood at the kitchen bench to have mine, which is what I usually do. It never used to be like that, she was always up first.*

*Then the shower lady came yesterday; she comes on a Monday, Wednesday and a Friday to shower Rosie. So I put the towels out and I got Rosie's clothes out. We have got a heated towel rail and I wrapped the towel around it, then her singlet and then her*

*knickers so they are nice and warm. And I heated the bathroom up. The shower lady came and did that and dressed Rosie and then she was away. While she is doing that I am just waiting in the wings. Then I had my shower.*

*Oh it is good to have the help. Sometimes she can't wipe herself down and I can tell she is embarrassed. Last time the son came he said oh mum's had an accident and I said don't worry I will fix it. He panicked and I said don't worry and he stood there watching. He said crikey, I didn't think you would ever have to do that. But that's just the way it is [Tom, 91].*

As Tom describes his yesterday we hear how every detail in the morning's routine has been carefully *worked out*. The seemingly simple task of having Rosie take her medication is revealed as a thoughtfully *organised* routine; each step planned and ordered. But behind Tom's preparedness for yesterday are the many previous *frustrations* and having things not work. So yesterday was the culmination of things Tom has *worked out* over time. Yet Rosie's dementia likely means Tom's working things out is not yet passed.

Just as Tom speaks of Rosie's medication being *camouflaged*, his thoughtful organising is easily concealed by the unremarkable routineness of the day's start. The story shows how being there for Rosie is foremost in Tom's thoughts. He tells of giving Rosie *her medication first* and of first giving Rosie *her breakfast in the bed*. So many little things already done before Tom stands alone in the kitchen having his breakfast. In saying *it never used to be like that* Tom points to how much things have changed in being with Rosie in the context of her dementia. His reflections are tinged with a sadness of 'losing' the Rosie who was *always up first*.

Then, as Tom goes on to describe getting things ready for the shower lady's arrival, his attentiveness to Rosie's comforts is revealed. Rosie's being comfortable matters to Tom. His thoughtfulness is illuminated in the detail. He tells of having *wrapped the towel*, then Rosie's *singlet* and *then her knickers* around the heated towel rail, in addition to *heating the bathroom up*. In his

preparedness for having things *nice and warm* for Rosie, Tom reveals his concern. Heidegger (1927/1962) distinguishes the nature of concern which is toward others, rather than things, as solicitude. “Solicitude is guided by *considerateness* and *forbearance*” (Heidegger, p. 159). Accordingly, solicitude is an apt notion for interpreting Tom’s ‘being-with’ as carer. His actions, as he describes them, illuminate a deep ‘considerateness’ by way of his thoughtful and careful regard, as well as his sensitiveness towards Rosie’s *embarrassments*. Forbearance shows in Tom’s being patient. None of his words seemed veiled in frustration or resentment toward Rosie or the daily demands of caring. In the context of Rosie’s advancing dementia, Tom’s being-with Rosie is a being-with as carer.

Concernful attentiveness to Rosie’s everyday needs provides a structure for Tom’s morning routine. However, he says it is *good to have* the shower lady’s help three days a week. Having help momentarily frees up Tom’s time, opening up the space for doing something else. Yet instead, Tom is *just waiting in the wings*. Waiting is a mode or “state of expectation or readiness” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 1259). Thus Tom’s words speak of his lingering watchfully; being ready. In his waiting, Tom remains concernfully absorbed with Rosie’s needing care. His readiness discloses an understanding of himself as being Rosie’s carer. “Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein....Dasein ‘is’ essentially for the sake of Others” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 160). Interpreted in the context of this anecdote, the fundamentally relational nature of Tom’s existence is revealed. He is ‘essentially for the sake of Rosie.’ What Tom does everyday is because of, and out of solicitude for, Rosie. But perhaps Tom is just waiting in the wings because being carer is simply what occupies him. His absorption in things for the sake of Rosie may mean Tom is not open to considering other things which could momentarily be the object of his concern. Possibly, when Tom is not doing the caring he does not know what else to do.

Yet how did the realness of Tom’s being carer remain hidden from his son? Carelessly Tom’s son says he *didn’t think* caring for his mother *would ever* come to *doing that*, the taking care of Rosie’s incontinence. As such, Tom’s accepted-ness of how things just are is further illuminated in the face of his son’s unthinking-ness. For Tom, having things ‘come to this’ means being-with as carer

is just the way it is. He is content with how it is. He finds fulfilment in being Rosie's carer.

Hence, Tom's being-with as carer is an enriched, engaged mode of being-with. Yet it is not always this way.

### **Being-with as Being-alone**

Florence was the second eldest of six children. Now at age 90, all except Florence's youngest sister, Mary, have passed away. She spoke of having moved with her husband to be close to her sister:

*I have one sister left, she is six years younger than me, and she lives in a downstairs apartment in this building but I don't see very much of her. She has always lived in this area so she has got lots of friends over here but I don't know the people. See I came from Mt Albert. She said oh there is only you and I left we should be together. And this little apartment was the only one they had left so I took it. We moved in here three years ago. It is big enough for Ernest and me anyhow.*

*I last saw my sister Mary a week ago. She bought a crumble cake at the supermarket and they said you might as well take two because you get one for free, so she brought one up for me. But she just put it on the bench, she wouldn't sit down. She never stays and has a cup of tea or anything. We don't do anything together. We are just too far apart in age I think. I know she is a lot older than my young friend Jane but Jane and I get on better. Mary is totally different than me, totally different; she has got different interests [Florence, 90].*

Florence points out that she has only *one sister left*. Her words unveil the preciousness of still having 'one' living relative. Behind her words is a sense of wonderment in having had four siblings, three of them younger, already pass away. Thus being aged brings Florence's understanding of life's finiteness to the fore. The sisters' deciding they *should be together* points to each one knowing the

other may not be ‘here’ for much longer. Thus the sisters’ feeling they ‘should’ be together indicates they each heard the call for closeness as the only remaining siblings. In contrast, in the way Florence tells the story, being-with Ernest seems overshadowed by her desiring togetherness with her sister. In continually moving-closer to the end of being-in-the-world, togetherness with the last of her family takes on a salience for Florence.

Florence and Ernest moved for-the-sake-of the sisters being ‘together’ yet she describes how she does *not see very much of Mary*. In saying she does ‘not see much’ of her sister, Florence’s disappointment is unveiled. The actuality of how things are seems to stand in contrast to Florence’s unspoken expectations for how ‘being together’ would be. “To expect something possible is always to understand it and to ‘have’ it with regard to whether and when and how it will be actually present-at-hand. Expecting...is essentially a *waiting for that actualization*”(Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 306). Thus Florence’s undisclosed understanding of how being ‘together’ with Mary would be, is not realised for her. Being disappointed three years later points to Florence’s expecting to feel a ‘being-with-ness’ that was never to be. Possibly the sisters never spoke of what being together meant to the other, so Florence’s expectations may never have been Mary’s expectations. And being six years Mary’s senior may have thrown up Florence’s stronger desire for family closeness.

Paradoxically, the sisters’ nearness discloses a distance between them. The absence of the expected togetherness illuminates Florence’s aloneness. Thus Florence’s being-with her sister is a mode of being-alone. However, Florence still ‘expects’ a togetherness in her encounters with Mary. Accordingly, her disappointment again shows as she describes Mary’s *just putting* the free cake on the bench, in her not stopping to *sit down*, as well as in her *never staying for a cup of tea or anything*. What Florence experiences is a being disregarded by Mary; she feels Mary’s indifference towards her. As such, the ‘being-aloneness’ of being-with Mary discloses “deficient modes of solicitude. Being...without one another, passing one another by, [and] not ‘mattering’ to one another” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 158).

As a way of explaining away her disappointment, Florence puts things down to Mary's being *totally different* with *different interests*. The six years between them means the two sisters are not greatly different in age, yet the coming together disclosed their different-ness. So the 'should' of the aged sisters being together falls away to uncover an alienness between them (Heidegger, 1927/1962). When Florence speaks of her sister being different, her words reveal the estrangement of being-with as a being-alone.

On the other hand, being without someone may be experienced as an enriched mode of being-with. Numerous anecdotes suggested an Other's death does not mean the experience of 'being-with' is ended.

### **Being-with as Remembering**

Nine of the participants were already widowed; Ferguson twenty-six years ago and Mary just eighteen months ago. Modes of remembering appeared in their everyday story-telling. Madge had published a booklet of the family history in time for her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Frank as the eldest living of his siblings was hand writing the family stories he remembered. Merrill already had many scrapbooks full of newspaper clippings, letters and cards pertaining to family and she busied herself with collating her daily memoirs for passing on. And Mary had just completed 300 pages of hand-written notes from her diaries, which she started in 1931.

Clark's story is offered as a moving example of remembering as a mode of being-with in the everyday:

*My daughter and I had trees planted down at Little Shoal Bay and I go down there for two hours every week day. I don't go down on Saturday and Sunday. I went down today and sat there for a while. Quite often there are some people down there. One of the things I worry about, inasmuch as, for some unknown reason you have got maniacs going around and chopping pohutukawa trees down and it's pohutukawas that we planted down there. What am I going to*

*do if some maniac has come and chopped them down? But luckily they are still standing.*

*It is a nice day today so I sat on the bench we had put down there. On it is a small plaque with the words “we used to sit on this bench shaded by the leaves” because there used to be a willow tree there. But that died so they cut it down, so all you have got are pohutukawas that have been there for five years. The tallest one isn’t even as high as this yet, so there is not very much shade. So people look at this and they are looking all around, wondering what the words mean. So there we are.*

*Today I watched the tide come in. My wife and I used to go down there every day and that is where we used to spend our afternoons. It is where we enjoyed being. The Council quite likely wouldn’t object but, her ashes are there. I go down there and I think back about all the pleasant times that we have had together. She might have been gone five years now but I still miss her [Clark, 89].*

Slowly Clark’s story unfolds as he describes being at Little Shoal Bay. He was there today, just as he is for *two hours every week day*. The routineness of his being there speaks of its significance to being-in his day. Clark goes on to tell of the *pohutukawa trees* he and his daughter had planted there and his *worrying* that they may be vandalised. The worrying reveals the essentiality of the trees’ existence. Then Clark describes the bench seat he and his daughter *had put down there* and of having it inscribed with a text we are yet to understand in the context of this anecdote. Clark’s detailed, ontical description of the place and the things there continues. In the detail he speaks of an everyday dwelling with “things ‘invested with value’” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 92). In his harking back to talking about the Bay, the trees and the bench, the things show ‘as’ being important. Yet Clark’s language covers over and points to a more primordial ‘as.’ The things are there ‘as’ remembering.

As the story continues, the essential ‘being-with-ness’ is unveiled. Clark mentions he and his wife *used to go down there every day*. The place symbolises their togetherness; it is the place they *enjoyed being*. Where Clark now sits for two hours each day is the place he ‘used to be with’ his wife. Their being there together is in the past. Eventually, Clark tells of his wife being *gone five years now*. The fact of her passing is held back in the story, not because it is unimportant; rather it holds the meaning and was perhaps the most difficult part to bring into the light. Now when Clark is there, sitting on ‘their’ bench, surrounded by ‘their’ pohutukawa trees, his wife is no longer with him in a material way. And despite the fact that other people, strangers, are often there, Clark is with no-one. Clark is alone. Ontologically though, his being there is still a mode of being-with; a being-with in memories.

Hence, it is the being-with as remembering which draws Clark to be at Little Shoal Bay each day. Being there opens his everyday to experiencing his *still missing her*. It is Clark’s place of being drawn to *thinking back* and remembering the *pleasant times they had together*. Ritualistically, being in the place where *her ashes* lie means Clark is ‘near’ his wife. Heidegger (1927/1962) describes such rituals as the “cult of graves” (p. 282). Being at Little Shoal Bay is a commemorating. Ontologically “the bereaved stay with [the one who has passed away] in sorrowful remembrance and care for [them] in reverence” (King, 2001, p. 146). Hence, Clark’s being-with as remembering is his way of holding on to being-with his deceased wife. He gives part of his everyday over to remembering her. “Remains, monuments, and records that are still present-at-hand, are *possible* ‘material’ for the concrete disclosure of the Dasein which has-been-there” (Heidegger, p. 446). In being-with as remembering, Clark’s wife is not lost to him in his everyday.

Nonetheless, the longer one’s own life goes on, the greater the likelihood that significant others will be lost to this world.

## **Being Left Behind**

Through the course of this study many stories were told about others who had already passed away. Madge’s anecdote stood out in its poignancy. During

our conversation she was talking about being the second youngest of seven children. She and Dora had always worked and lived together as spinster sisters and continued to do so when Madge married at age 73. Her husband died just two years ago. Madge brought out an old family photograph to show me:

*This photo is at my parent's golden wedding anniversary. It was 1946. That's all the six girls. That's me there and that's Dora. That's the oldest one, and mother and father. That one's gone and that one's gone and that one's gone. This one, Cecilia died before her mother. That's June's first husband, he's gone and she married again. Those two have gone. Martha died with a brain tumour, she wasn't quite 80. My brother, he's gone, Iris has gone, Suzanne's gone, Gavin's wife, she's gone. Gosh what a lot eh? And all those in that row, they've all gone. So I am left behind you see [Madge, 95].*

As she goes about showing me the photograph of her and her siblings taken sixty years ago now, Madge falls into this narrative. She began by gliding her finger over the rows of faces frozen in time and her thoughts came; *that one's gone and that one's gone and that one's gone*. In the moment, Madge became absorbed in noticing, as if for the first time, who had 'gone.' Yet she always already knew that all those from her generation, as well as some from the following generation, had passed away. Suddenly she announces, *gosh what a lot eh?* Her words point to being surprised. They reveal an astonishment; a mode of disbelieving as she takes in the fact that *they've all gone*. In the moment, Madge's absorption with the photograph becomes a disclosing. It discloses the realness of what she already knew. At 95 Madge has outlived her siblings and her generation of the extended family.

In 'noticing' how many have already gone Madge observes that she is *left behind*. In saying this, Madge illuminates her experience of being-in-the-world devoid of being-with-Others. Her words show an awareness of the Others' absence in her everyday. They reveal a sadness that her being-with-the-Others is in the past, rather than a regretful-ness of her own remaining in the world. Being

left behind brings feelings of relatedness to those who are missing from the everyday into words. Heidegger (1927/1962) proposes that ontologically “Being missing and ‘Being away’ are modes of Dasein-with, and are possible only because Dasein as Being-with lets the Dasein of Others be encountered in its world” (p. 157). Interpreting Madge’s story, her experience of being left behind is grounded in her world as a ‘with-world.’ Those she cared for and most cared about are gone. Yet ‘having been with’ them in the past opens up the experience of being left behind. Being left behind is a mode of remembering those who are missing in the everyday. As such, it is ontologically different than the previously described mode of being-alone which was characterised by an unconcernful indifference toward others.

Invisible in the story’s text is the mode of its telling. Madge’s demeanour revealed an accepted-ness of the others’ deaths. This impressed upon me her understanding of death as being a phenomenon of life itself. Certainly she has been alongside numerous significant others in their time of going out of the world. And while “we cannot compute the certainty of death by ascertaining how many cases of death we encounter” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 309), I interpret in Madge’s mood a fearless anticipation of her own death. What is left unsaid in the anecdote’s shadows is not a dwelling upon her own death, but rather a facing up to the impending end of her own existence. As the passing of significant others can be deeply felt “Dasein can thus gain an experience of death, all the more so because Dasein is essentially Being with Others” (Heidegger, p. 281). In other words, Madge’s ‘having-been-with-others’ she cared about and who are now passed on, evokes a vivid apprehension of the finiteness of her own being-in-the-world.

## **Being-with God**

Margaret, Christina, Mary, Ella and Pani each spoke of the meaning, strength and guidance which came to them through their faith. Christina’s anecdote is offered as a rich illustration of the stories about enduring the loss of family and friends:

*My Catholic faith is most important; it is the most important thing. When one loses somebody I think it becomes even stronger. I think it is the only thing to sustain one after someone dies; especially someone close. The music and the religion both help, particularly the requiem mass. It is very sad but it is very beautiful in lots of ways. I think for people who haven't any beliefs, it must be very sad for them really. I just think it is all in the hands of the Almighty, whatever goes on.*

*One thing, if people say to me, in 2007 we will be doing so-and-so, or 2008 we will be doing something, I think well, we might be. I never thought that before but I am inclined to think it now especially since Elsie and John went. So everything we do depends on the Almighty. I don't think we have any say really. I am not a religious person, but I certainly have my religion. Anyway that is just my own belief [Christina, 93].*

Christina tells of the importance of her faith, and says she thinks it is *the only thing to sustain one after someone dies*. She speaks of ‘one’ in general, but the meaning arises from the depths of her own experience. In saying her Catholic faith is the only thing which ‘sustains,’ she speaks of its bearing the weight and of keeping her from falling into sadness. Thus being with God is a solacement; it comforts in grief. The sadness of losing *someone close* is also laid to rest with the requiem mass. And Christina says that *whatever happens, it is all in the hands of the Almighty*. In revealing her belief, she points to where she finds meaning in what has gone before and what is yet to come. Hence, Christina’s being in the world is a “Being towards God” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 30).

Amid talk of the future Christina mentions how she is *inclined* to think she may not be there *doing something*. Thus, she speaks of *Elsie and John’s* passing as bringing her own mortality into the light. But Christina, through her faith, is delivered over to the ways of *the Almighty*. Accordingly, being with God means, ultimately, being with her loved ones in the afterlife. “The divine mystery of life is its simplicity—even if man has lost it through the fall, he can still find his way

back, through the grace of God, to unity and simplicity" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 25). Christina's anecdote suggests that being with God brings a strength to being aged; it means being with others for eternity.

In closing, the longer one's life goes on the more losses through death will be experienced. The stories told in the course of this study allude to being aged as potentially opening the way for a philosophical appreciation of life and death. It is as if each death endured holds the potential to reveal more of life's purpose.

## **A Reflection**

In this second findings chapter the anecdotes which showed the various ways the elders are 'with' others were brought into the light. Heidegger's interpretation of the human world as being a 'with-world' provided an overarching philosophical understanding. That is, our co-existence means we are always being co-determined through modes of 'Being-with Others,' even when alone. Maori beliefs about the land and ancestry provided ways of understanding being aged and being Maori in the contemporary context. Overall, 'being-with' others is about the relatedness which seems opened up by virtue of living to advanced age. Such modes may not be uniquely part of being aged. However, when others who were close are increasingly 'missing,' everyday relatedness holds on to what matters as being human; the being-with. Amid the solitariness that can come with being aged, being-with through memories and belonging are rich modes of human connectedness.

The world is a with-world, always a being  
with others, a being-with present others and  
a being-with absent others

As Belonging, being-with is identity, knowing  
the self only in connectedness, a being-with  
in the past, present and future

As Elder, being-with is hearing the silent  
call from within and beyond, summoned by the  
conscience, a knowing what to do

As Carer, being-with is essentially for  
the sake of the other, in concerned solicitude it is  
acceptedness, of it being just the way it is

As Being Alone, being-with is in the  
other's indifference, the aloneness unveiling the  
paradox of being close yet being distant

As Remembering, is a being-with in memories,  
dwelling with things, dwelling in places, dwelling  
with remains, rituals of remembering

As Being Left Behind, is a being-with those who  
are missing, only left behind because of the  
being-with in life, knowing death through the other

As Being with God, is a being in the hands of the Almighty,  
delivered over to Divine mystery, the promise of  
being-with for eternity

Being Aged is a Being-with-Others

## Chapter Eight: Experiencing the Unaccustomed

The unaccustomed experience is not in the unfamiliar, rather, it emerges amid the profoundly familiar. Anecdotes which reveal an uncomfortableness of the unaccustomed are brought forward in this chapter. They are stories of just doing things so deeply familiar they do not call for thinking; they are just done. It is this very characteristic which shows as lost when the accustomed is suddenly not there. Encountering the unaccustomed is not a thing outside the body, like an unfamiliar object, it is an embodied in-the-world encountering. Perhaps it is a fleeting moment in which the uncomfortableness comes quickly before withdrawing; a thing barely noticed. Or perhaps it lingers long enough for the uncomfortableness to draw concern and be dwelled upon. It is an experience of things simply not seeming right. Stories about such events tumbled out in the midst of the conversations. It was as if the person had not intended to speak of the event as they did. The revealing just happened in the talk of going about the ordinarily mundane and the intimately private everyday events.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

Heidegger (1927/1962) talks about the ‘canniness’ of being in the familiar everyday and the ‘uncanniness’ of experiencing the unfamiliar. He uses the German word “*unheimlich*” which literally translates as “*unhomely*” (King, 2001, p. 96). In English canny means “knowing...; [or] artful” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 164). Hence canniness is characterised by ‘just knowing what to do;’ a ‘without thinking’ engagement. The character of canniness is being-at-home, a feeling of belonging, in which one experiences the “comfortableness of the accustomed” (Heidegger, p. 422). In a mode of being characterised by uncanniness, or anxiety, the person is brought back from his or her absorption in the customary. “Everyday familiarity collapses....Being-in enters into the existential ‘mode’ of the ‘not-at-home’” (Heidegger, p. 233). In the event “the

everyday familiarity with and at-homeness in the world is suddenly broken in dread" (King, p. 96).

Not-at-homeness is always situated. Experiencing it is at all times "thisly" (Harman, 2007, p.28). It presents while doing this thing, in this place, at this time. As such, not-being-at-home may spring into the light or remain in the shadows in any one moment; it is not predictable. Accordingly, the interpretive thread running through this chapter is of not-being-at-home as an appearance of being aged. Being aged is a priori to experiencing not-being-at-home in the midst of the usually familiar. Being aged is always already there before it announces itself. However what shows may be a mere semblance, a showing from something other than being aged. In my interpretations I remain attentive to anecdotes which point to being aged as a showing of itself from itself, and those in which being aged may be merely showing itself as something which it is not (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Each anecdote brought forward throws a different light upon the phenomenon of not-being-at-home 'in the moment.'

## **Being on Show**

Music has always been in Madge's life. In her teens she was already playing the organ at church and singing in the choir. Her enjoyment of song sustained her belonging to a ladies' singing group for 30 years, often putting on shows for others. Madge tells of an event which occurred just two days prior:

*Tuesday afternoon I was picked up by a friend and taken to a ladies' club in Takapuna. It's a club I belonged to years ago. But I am still in touch with the people, particularly the one that runs the music section. I had been invited to play a duet with my young pianist friend. And I wasn't sure about taking up the invitation. I said I didn't want to get paid for it. But anyway I tried it.*

*I met people from way back. And I don't think it was a very good success. I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy about the performance. The performance; just straight out. I just didn't feel comfortable on the stage. The place has a little performing stage with lights,*

*and I don't walk very well now. With my feet, I have to wear these shoes and I'm not really very steady so I wasn't feeling very comfortable. I could not have stood up and done any singing without holding on to something. And another thing, although I am partially deaf, I can hear fairly well, but a lot of others there were deaf and they seemed to not communicate so much. There wasn't the enjoyment where you feel it from the audience.*

*That's it really. I was disappointed in my own performance. Now I've tried it and I won't do such a public one again. I was on show and I didn't like being on show. I know I am not upright and now at my age I haven't got the movement, the free, flowing movement. But you wouldn't expect that [Madge, 95].*

Madge *wasn't sure* about taking up the invitation to play a piano duet at the ladies' club. The unsure-ness speaks of doubting; of holding misgivings. She is somehow fearful about the pending event. Yet she plays duets with her young pianist friend each week when the friend visits. So Madge's misgivings stem from something which is not yet clear to her. She is wary of the yet to be encountered. Heidegger (1927/1962) proposes "*that in the face of which* we fear, the 'fearsome', is in every case something which we encounter within-the-world....[which] has detrimentality as its kind of involvement" (p. 179). Prior to the performance, Madge already fears that something somehow detrimental awaits her.

As she describes being in the moment Madge initially harks back, reiterating her concern about her performing, her playing, their duet. As she continues her 'fearing' is uncovered. "And in fearing, fear can then look at the fearsome explicitly, and 'make it clear' to itself" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 180). The detriment shows in Madge's anguish as she recounts the event. Her eyes look away as if seeing something far off and she clasps her hands together. What Madge already feared was her 'agedness' going *on show*; being illuminated upon the stage. 'Being on show' was a public 'showing' of her unsteadiness, her not being upright and her not-flowing movements. Madge's usual comfortableness as

a seasoned performer withdrew in the context of her ‘agedness’ being disclosed to the audience. Being under the watchful gaze of long-known acquaintances seems to heighten Madge’s uncomfortableness. But they also will have aged in their own way. Do they even notice Madge’s unsteadiness or that her fingers do not flow across the keyboard as they once did? Perhaps they look on and envy her playing. Yet Madge’s feeling of not-being-at-home grows in her thinking that ‘they’ are noticing she has aged.

Still, the meaning of performing is not just in the playing. Performing is a mode of *communicating*; it is relating through music. *Not feeling the enjoyment from the audience* tells Madge she is not communicating with those present. Was it just an announcing of the others’ deafness or were they not enjoying her performance? Regardless, Madge’s feeling of not-being-at-home intensifies. Primordially it seems her uncomfortableness is in her experience of being there as one who is aged rather than as the pianist. In her ordinary day Madge’s not standing upright, as one *would expect*, is just there in its usual way. In contrast, in this event, Madge’s feeling of being on show is a disclosing of being aged to herself (Overgaard, 2004). As such, her uncomfortableness is not just in the present. It connects to her past and her future. In the anguish of her agedness being on show Madge is brought back from her absorption in playing, her already-there misgivings come before her, and she knows there will be no more public performances. Perhaps what she feared beforehand was accepting her days of performing were ended.

I turn now to a different ‘on show’ disclosing of being aged. Christina speaks of a sudden holding back amid a familiar task as the former music teacher:

*I have to present a cup for music at the local College prize giving each year and last year they had a temporary stairway placed in front of the stage. It had 15 steps but no rails on the side and for the first time in my life I felt a bit uneasy going up the steps. My sight has been weak all my life but the hesitation is unusual.*

*So, I didn’t go up the steps. The headmaster was quite gallant and came down the stairs to me. I presented the cup at the base of the*

*steps instead of going up. Now I had gone up the steps at the side of the stage for 12 years, but the new temporary stairs with no supports were a bit worrying to me. But that is a bit strange for me because I had never even thought about going up stairs before.*

*I think it was because of my sight. I lost the sight of one eye through an accident when I was two, and I only have peripheral vision in this right eye so I have to work with the left eye all the time. I find that going down steps, unless they are marked on the tread, is worrying for me. I just have to be very careful. And I had never thought about it before. The hesitation was most unusual for me because I have 14 stairs here and I used to run up and down them. It is something that has come with the age I think. I don't mind walking because I have walked so much all my life. I walk from here to the shops.*

*I was always reticent as a child growing up but this is a different thing. This was something where I hesitated, especially with the steps, and that annoys me [Christina, 93].*

Christina discloses the feeling *a bit uneasy* as being a first-ever concern for her. Her uneasiness comes in the face of the call to be on stage presenting the music award. Christina's sudden uneasiness is a foreboding of something more ominous. It is an inauspicious foreboding. It foreshadows something which is not yet, but might be. Yet Christina is the college's music award presenter. She has *never thought about* going up the steps at the prize giving before, she just has. On other occasions the steps were 'ready-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1927/1962). They were simply there 'in-order-to' be on stage presenting the award. But in this event, the readiness-to-hand of the *temporary stairway* withdraws. In the withdrawing the *no side rails* and *no tread marks* show as a concern.

As she works to understand the hesitating, Christina compares 'these' steps on 'this' day with the stairs in her usual day. At home, in-order-to be upstairs or be downstairs in going about her everyday, the stairs are at her

disposal. She goes up and down without thinking about the going up or the going down. But these stairs are suddenly not there for her in the same way; they are ‘unready-to-hand’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962). The ‘hesitating’ draws Christina back from her absorption in the moment of being there to present the music award.

The publicness of the event seems to be situational in disclosing Christina’s uneasiness. Something is *worrying*. What if she trips or falls? What if she gets part way up or down and needs assistance? If this happened, those who gaze on may merely see her as the 93-year-old-Christina, rather than as the former music teacher. Perhaps if she was alone she may have proceeded on these stairs *very carefully*, mindful of their unreadiness-to-hand. But Christina is not alone; the audience await her. Her foreboding, as revealed in the hesitating. It holds her back from ‘being on show.’ Being aged announces itself in her hesitating.

In her language Christina speaks of being *a bit uneasy*; of things being *a bit worrying*; and of the situation being *a bit strange*. ‘A bit’ suggests a fleeting uneasiness or just a trace or of concern. Yet she also talks of it being *most unusual, worrying* and *annoying* for her. This movement, or instability, in the text is not a reason to call her experience into question. Rather, it shows how Christina works, in the throes of telling this story, to find the words and ways for expressing how things were for her (Gadamer, 2004). As she recounts her experience now, Christina is reflective in ‘thinking’ it was her vision which caused the uncomfortable hesitating. Yet later she ‘thinks’ it *is something that has come with the age*. In this way, Christina’s questioning points to her working to make sense of this one event amid a lifetime of simply going up stairs.

A mode of hesitating suggests ‘being dubious’ in the face of that which is fearful. Being alarmed, then, reveals a greater intensity of fearfulness.

## **Being Alarmed**

The familiarity of using the car to do everyday things means the driving is usually taken-for-granted. One does not usually drive for the sake of driving. Ordinarily the driving happens in order to be somewhere or to do something. During the research conversations, stories about driving the car or giving up the car often surfaced. The talk frequently opened up around the instituted re-

licensing tests for the ‘older’ driver. Chronological age alone, not driving skill, pre-ordains the testing; pointing to a social world which already questions elders’ competence in driving.

Readyng herself for her upcoming driver’s test threw Christina into a situation she had not anticipated:

*It was difficult giving up the car. I didn’t want to. As a matter of fact I was due to renew my licence last December, and I had to do a two-yearly driving test. Before the tests I always have a man come from the AA<sup>23</sup> and go round the district with me. It has all altered from when I was a child. I used to go up and down to Browns Bay to my grandmother’s bach, and now it’s industrial.*

*When I went out with the AA man this time it seemed to me there was so much traffic. I began to feel nauseous and I thought well it is not worth doing this to feel sick. I love driving but I didn’t like the traffic and I suddenly said to the man “look I don’t think I will drive anymore.” He said to me “that would be a pity but it is your choice.” So that was the choice I made and that was it. Just while I was driving I began to feel uneasy and I never felt like that driving before. I had been driving since I was about 22 and that is a long time. I used to drive over the bridge to the city to films and plays and ballets and thought nothing of it.*

*So I sold my car to my nephew’s daughter and she called the car Christina after me. All I wanted my car for was to go down to the shops or up to the church. But I am quite happy I am not driving. I walk down and back most times to do my shopping but sometimes I get too many parcels so I have to get a taxi home. I miss the car but there we are. I read in the paper that from November they are*

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<sup>23</sup> The ‘AA’ is an abbreviation for the Automobile Association.

*going to abolish the practical test for drivers over 80 and just let people have the licence [Christina, 93].*

In this anecdote, Christina is doing the deeply familiar; driving her car. She is there, on the roads she has driven so many times since her childhood. Being amid the familiar means her past and many fond memories are before her. Yet as we listen to the story unfold of Christina's routine preparing for her driving test, the suddenness of being *nauseous* reveals the intensity of her embodied uneasiness. In her nausea, the gravity of what she experiences shows. Its abruptness speaks of the unaccustomed nature of 'encountering' the traffic in this way. In the moment, Christina is filled with trepidation. "If something threatening breaks in suddenly upon concerned Being-in-the-world..., fear becomes *alarm*...[and when] that which threatens has the character of something altogether unfamiliar, then fear becomes *dread*" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 181-182). As her usual comfort in driving withdraws, Christina experiences a profound fearfulness. The fear is alarming and brings her back from her absorption in driving. Being alarmed gives way to 'dreading' something. The intense uncomfortableness radiates beyond the moment toward the yet to come. Already Christina knows she *will not drive anymore*. Her seventy years of driving are suddenly behind her.

However, the anecdote points to a primordial heightened attentiveness to driving. Christina's going out with the instructor suggests she was already unsure about driving. Her not-being-at-home on the busy roads was already there pending the moment of illumination. So how might the alarming uncomfortableness be an announcing of being aged? It alludes to Christina's already anticipating she should *give up the car*. Being alarmed tells her 'it is time' to do so. Nevertheless she speaks of her *love* of driving, uncovering its previous everyday meaningfulness. Driving opened up everyday possibilities. It was for the sake of other things; of attending church, getting the shopping done and enjoying concerts.

Letting go of what driving opened up in her everyday is what made *giving up the car* difficult. The words 'giving up' speak of a surrendering; a regretful

yielding to the situation. Yet, as she talks now, merely three months on, Christina says she is *quite happy* not driving. Her words point to letting things be as they are. The experience of being alarmed is in her past yet it is still present.

Paradoxically, Christina says she *misses the car*. Seemingly, giving up the driving came more easily to her than giving up the car; her car. This was the car which was always there for her in going about her day. Having the car was part of what Christina did and who she was. Keeping the car within the family and being the car's name-sake means 'Christina,' the car, still gets about on the familiar roads.

In general, how might someone who is aged know when it 'is time' to give up the car, if at all? Christina's time was announced alarmingly to her. She simply knew 'the time' had come. Yet others' anecdotes revealed a mode of fearing that which might "come to pass" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 183). Other participants spontaneously mentioned their upcoming driving test. Their stories pointed to fearing the future possibility of not-being-at-home with driving. "As a modal category of presence-at-hand, possibility signifies what is *not yet* actual and what is *not at any time* necessary. It characterizes the merely possible" (Heidegger, p. 183). Yet the dwelling on this topic suggested a more fundamental concern. It implied the fearing of a possible accident; of possibly harming oneself or someone else. Heidegger suggests 'Being-possible' is an essential way of being-in-the-world and pertains to being concerned about others and the world.

### **Fearing the Merely Possible**

Frank's story illuminates a mode of possibility in relation to that which is 'not yet actual' with his driving:

*My next driving test is August. I am not frightened of the driving test; that is no problem; it's just whether I will be able to read the eye test card. That's the only hazy bit. I am not worried about it. If I am finished, OK I am finished. I can't worry about it. I haven't worried about it much; taxis are cheaper than owning a car aren't they for the few times that you need it [Frank, 97].*

Frank mentions he is *not frightened* by the prospect of his ‘driving’ being tested but his words open up a sense of fearing the possible. Frank fears what *the eye test* might show. It suggests a feeling of being in control of the driving itself but fearing the possibility of that over which he has no control; his diminishing eyesight. He thinks ‘he’ would pass the test but will ‘his eyes’ pass the test? The fearing what is possible suggests Frank already knows he may be close to giving up driving. Even though Frank says he is *not worried* if his driving is ended, his concern is announced in the way he speaks of his worrying about what is merely possible. He proclaims he *can’t worry about it*. He tells himself if it is the finish of his driving, it is the finish. It is how it will be. Yet, the concern still shows. Frank says he hasn’t *worried about it much*; but the worrying is still there. As he thinks about how to possibly be ‘at-home’ with not driving, Frank turns away from fearing. And in the turning away his possible not-at-homeness is ‘dimmed down’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

## **Being Forgetful**

In this next anecdote, the announcing of being aged is not in the mode of having misgivings toward that which is yet to come, or of an intensity that alarms. Tom tells of going about a trivial task in his day:

*I notice it when I want to do something, like I had my ladder out, what was I doing? Oh yes a screw had come out on the guttering. Of course I went up the ladder and I took my screw driver and I had forgotten to take the screw up and I had to go all the way down again. That’s how it happens. That’s what tells me I am getting older [Tom, 91].*

As Tom relays the story of going about fixing his guttering we hear how his *wanting to do something* unfolds in a way which is different than usual. He goes all the way up the ladder in order to affix the new screw but it is not amongst the tools he has ready-to-hand. So Tom tells of having to *go all the way down again* to get what he has forgotten. Then comes the going all the way back up again. In the going up and down the ladder twice instead of once the seemingly

simple job takes more than Tom expected it to. Thus, Tom's being aged shows in the subtleness of everyday forgetting. It appears in his noticing that which was previously taken-for-granted. Being aged announces itself in the little things that get left behind. But Tom's not-at-homeness is not simply in forgetting, rather, it is in not accomplishing that which he set out to do in the first instance.

Tom did not go up the ladder in order to take up the screwdriver and the screw; he went up the ladder for the purpose of repairing his spouting. Turning to Heidegger (1927/1962), that “with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work—that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand” (p. 99). In this way, the unreadiness-to-hand of the guttering being fixed is momentarily disclosed. Tom is not-at-home in being hindered in his familiar tasks. Being hindered means Tom falls short of getting the job done with the usual efficiency. The forgetting gets in the way of Tom’s doing. It announces his *getting older*. Behind his words is the frustration of how being forgetful hinders his usual productivity in and around the home. The character of this not-being-at-home is the subtleness of that which draws attention; of the everyday taken-for-granted-ness withdrawing. It is an elusive, insidious uncomfortableness which might be easily glossed over in going about the day. In the same way, being aged may show itself as a tiredness which creeps in.

## **Being Tired**

When Mary sent back her consent form she included a hand-written letter saying “*I feel I may have something to offer. My husband and I were married for 62 years, but he died in October 2004. I live alone and still lead ‘sit dance’ lessons and play petanque and I am 91. God bless you in your work.*” And during our conversation Mary shows me one of her sit dance routines as she sings My Grandfather’s Clock. Being drawn to do things for the sake of others shows as she describes the busyness of her customary day:

*Until a month ago I was running only one sit dance class a week at the community support group. I was asked to run classes for the local stroke club as well so I said I would do that once a fortnight,*

*on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of the month. I did the second one at the stroke club two weeks ago.*

*I left here about a quarter to 10 and walked to the community support group which is nearly a mile away. I am beginning to find it a bit tiring. I had morning tea with them and I started the sit dance at half past 10. There were 8 in the group and the helpers joined in. The music plays and I just do the movements and they follow me if they can. It keeps them alive. It exercises them when they are in a wheelchair. One man poor old man, he is so nice; he doesn't do much because he can't. I mean he is stuck in the wheelchair; he can't even put his legs down. I never do more than about quarter of an hour. That is enough for people who are ill or sick.*

*After the class I just missed the bus so I waited for the 20 past 11 bus to the Bay, then I walked to the Stroke Club and ran sit dance there. So that was two in one day. I found it just a little bit too much because I play petanque on a Wednesday. So last time it was two classes plus petanque and I was a bit tired. The first game is from half past one to quarter past two, then they start another game but I find it is too much for me to do two. I always play only the first game.*

*Last week I was so tired that I thought I don't want to give up sit dance, I don't want to give up petanque, what will I do? Then I thought well I might start doing sit dance one week and petanque the next but I am not sure yet about that [Mary, 91].*

As Mary describes the last day she ran two sit dance classes, we hear how a new tiredness is unveiled. The first glimpse comes as a *beginning to find* the mile walk *a bit tiring*. And it is hinted at when she tells of the two groups and playing petanque as being *just a little bit too much*. By saying 'a bit' and 'a little,' Mary's words dim down her experience. They suggest an insignificant, barely-

there tiredness. Yet through her story, Mary keeps returning to the ‘tiring-ness’ and the ‘too-much-ness’ of being in this day. Eventually she uncovers being *so tired*. Her words convey a weariness which is unfamiliar in its depth and intensity. Mary is not-at-home in the face of this burdensome tiredness. She is thrown into knowing all these events in a single day are now too much for her. Being aged announces itself in the unaccustomed tiredness.

But more than this, Mary’s being-in-the-world is for the sake of others. Her concern toward others shows in her willingness to take up running the one, then the two, sit dance classes. Her readiness to answer the call is already there, drawing Mary toward accepting the invitation. This is how Mary knows herself; as the one who has ‘something to offer.’ Accordingly she involves herself in the world through being there for others. Ontologically “Dasein understands itself beforehand in the mode of assigning itself as *that for which* it has let entities be encountered beforehand” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 119). Thus, in assigning herself to the second sit dance class, Mary holds no prior understanding of the tiredness which is yet to come. She could only come to know the limits of her embodied energy through experiencing this unaccustomed tiredness. It throws her into coming to know herself differently and to knowing her possibilities for caring about others differently.

The mode of being tired which shows as an announcing of being aged is somehow different than other modes of tiredness. Christina tried to explain it by comparing it with her feeling *a little tired* when she was teaching big music classes at the college. Now at 93 she speaks of a tiredness like she has *never felt before* in her life. This tiredness is there when she thinks she has *not been doing very much. That is the body wearing out*. Being aged is only evident in the absence of feeling the energy to carry on with the familiar. Similarly, being weaker only shows in the midst of the accustomed.

## **Being Weaker**

Being in the day doing everyday things means our embodied capacities are called on in taken-for-granted ways. For example, we do not have to think about

how much strength is needed for a customary task, we simply do it. This next anecdote of Matelot's is about preparing for winter in the usual way:

*I try and keep myself going. When we go to do's<sup>24</sup> I try and get up and have a dance. And I clean up outside and what-have-you, like chopping wood. I still chop the wood.*

*I was out chopping wood three or four days ago. We had some short pieces out there and when I came to get the electric chainsaw, it won't bloody go so I chopped them with the axe. It took me ages because the wood was hard and dry. And when I went to pick up the pieces, about this size, I couldn't lift the damn things. Before, I used to just pick them up no trouble. So I am not as strong as I used to be and I can't move around as fast, compared with when I retired anyway. I am just slower [Matelot, 74].*

Matelot tells of getting his firewood ready, just as he is *used to*. Having always done the wood-chopping means he already 'knows' just how big to cut the pieces for his fireplace. He does not stop to see if he can pick up the pieces he chops; he just chops them. But in *going to pick up the wood* Matelot's accustomed strength is not there for him. In the event, his diminished strength is brought into the light. An unfamiliar 'being weaker' is revealed. Not being able to pick up the pieces of wood is an announcing of Matelot's being aged. Perhaps the chainsaw's unreadiness-to-hand meant his strength was drawn on more completely. Still the unaccustomed is experienced. In his cursing we hear Matelot's being taken-a-back from his absorption in simply getting the job done. Matelot only comes to know his strength when it is not there for him; he knows it in its depleted-ness.

Not being able to pick up the wood tells Matelot he is *not as strong as he used to be*. His diminished strength obtrudes; it stands in the way (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Yet before this moment he could not know his strength in a factual,

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<sup>24</sup> A 'do' is a colloquial term for a social event, particularly with musical entertainment.

anatomical way. He had no way of knowing its limits before the event of its being depleted. In other words, he could not understand his diminished strength until it was not there for him amid a deeply familiar task. “It is not the brain that understands, but the whole being in the world. And what we understand is not a brain state, but things in the world” (Wrathall, 2005, p. 41). Accordingly, Matelot could only know he was weaker when he experienced the pieces of wood as being too heavy.

Gradually declining muscle size and strength are recognised as normal and usual in the process of aging (Victor, 1987). Nearly a year has lapsed since Matelot last readied his firewood. The gradualness of his diminishing strength was concealed until called upon within this task as one which is only done every so often. Hence, the occasionality of chopping the wood delayed the unveiling of being weaker. In contrast, the illumination of embodied strength may also appear amid a daily event.

Mostly, the ‘how’ of getting dressed is veiled within the darkness of the deeply intuitive. The how of doing what we do in getting dressed is so ordinary and so close to us in our everyday that we cannot easily know it. As we set about being dressed or being undressed, the mode of getting into the dressed or undressed state is simply taken-for-granted. Usually the ‘getting’ of getting dressed or undressed is just done. It is mundane; ordinary in its daily repetitiveness (Sandywell, 2004). So much so, it is hard to imagine getting dressed as being one of *the hardest things* done in the day.

While talking with Ferguson, he gestures toward his woollen dressing gown which is draped across the chair:

*What the hell went wrong the other day? If anything goes wrong with the electricity that's bad. No, everything can be bad. I have a good dressing gown there, look. It is too bloody heavy now. I tried to put it on the other day. I had a hell of a time getting it on. And when I did get it on it was too bloody heavy and yet I have worn it all my life.*

*It used to be easy, just pull it on; easy. It is nice and warm, but when I tried to put it on the other day it was too heavy. After I went to all the trouble to get my arms in and getting it on, it was too bloody heavy. So I must be losing something else too, some strength. It must be something else.*

*I will wait and see how I go in winter. I will just have to put the heater on and get into bed. But I will wait and see; I can't do much about it. I don't know what it is. Just old age I suppose. I have got this way I can't do it, I just can't do it. There's no way of doing it. The strength has gone from my hands. I am just fading away I think. I don't know. It is hard to say isn't it? There is a lot I can't do [Ferguson, 97].*

Ferguson is used to just being in his dressing gown when he seeks its warmth. But this time, wanting to be in his dressing gown becomes *a hell of a time* for him. The words sound extreme; however, they are Ferguson's way of bringing his experience into language. In the hellishness of the event, we hear how the customary mundaneness of getting into his dressing gown is this time characterised by anguish and suffering. The ordinary is instead an ordeal. Paradoxically, the word 'hell' has its Anglo-Saxon roots in the word 'helan' meaning to hide, conceal or cover over (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982). Yet in this event, Ferguson's 'hell' of a time is an unconcealing rather than a concealing.

Then, once donned, instead of revealing its familiar character of warm comfortableness, Ferguson's dressing gown discloses an unaccustomed burdensome-ness. As he recounts the event, he describes his dressing gown as being *too bloody heavy*. In the moment, Ferguson is not-at-home with experiencing the gown's unfamiliar oppressive weightiness. He only comes to understand the unreadiness-to-hand of his embodied strength through this unaccustomed experience. His diminished strength unveils itself amid the usually mundane. Suddenly what was ordinary is distressingly obtrusive. Hence, Ferguson's 'being aged' announces itself in being weaker. It announces itself in the face of his dressing gown's burdensome heaviness.

In saying he is *just fading away* the poignancy of this event is illuminated. Fading is a notion perhaps typically reserved for describing other phenomena or objects in the world; such as the fading light at the end of a day, or the fading colour of things exposed to the sunlight. Thus, “if a person transfers an expression from one thing to the other, he has in mind something that is common to both” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 428). In this way, Ferguson finds words and uses metaphor to express how being weaker is for him. It is his way of having me come to understand something so nebulous. An embodied ‘fading away’ speaks of a gradually dimming vigour; of a withering, or of gradually disappearing until there is nothing left. As I interpret it, this is what Ferguson was trying to tell me.

Returning to how Ferguson opened this story, he said that *everything can be bad*. His words point to already knowing that being-at-home with things may, at any moment, be given over to not-being-at-home. This understanding of Being-possible reveals an already-knowing about how being aged announces itself in the everyday. Still, Ferguson speaks of fading away rather than of being old.

### **Being ‘Old’**

Out of the blue, Florence [90] announced that she *wasn’t old until last year* when *the stuffing was knocked out of her* in two falls; first breaking her hip and then her arm. Ella told a similar story:

*I didn’t get old until last May. But actually what I meant by that, about 40 years ago I fell; I had a very bad fall running along the street. I had an appointment and the buses were a bit late and I was held up, so I was rushing like mad to get to the appointment and oh it was a bad fall. I didn’t notice anything then but gradually my hip went and in May I had a hip replacement and that is when I felt old. I have felt old since then.*

*Well you see, I couldn’t do anything, I couldn’t cook any dinner when I first came out of hospital. I would get out of bed and try to peel the potatoes or something and nothing would work. All of a sudden I was an old lady.*

*I was in hospital five days and when I came home I thought I would never ever do anything ever again. I felt giddy, but then that was from the operation. I was only on the waiting list for a few months because I was so healthy. I never took any medication for years and years, never; I didn't take even an aspro. So when it came time to have the operation, instead of being on the list for years, I got in ahead of 60-year-old people.*

*But instead of a two hour operation, I had a four hour operation and all that stuff they give you to put you to sleep, the anaesthetic, has to come out, even now. So that is colossal isn't it, and I was out in five days. The doctor wants to see me at the end of 12 months because he thinks I will be alright by then. I am in too much of a hurry I think. But I don't like this just sitting. Before I had the operation, although I had a stick and dreadful pain, shocking pain, I could still do more [Ella, 93].*

Ella's words announce the abruptness of 'knowing' she was *all of a sudden an old lady*. 'Being old' showed in finding she *couldn't do anything*. Being old appeared in having *nothing work* as she was accustomed to. The obtrusiveness of not-being-at-home in the midst of her ordinary day throws Ella into thinking she will *never ever do anything ever again*. Her emphasis on the 'never ever' reveals her anxiety in the conspicuousness of what is now absent from being in her everyday. The completeness of its absence points to a nothingness of the "potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 271). That is, the prominence of not-being-at-home amid the mundane makes itself known in the "nothing ready-to-hand within-the-world" (Heidegger, p. 231). In this way, being anxious is distinguished from being fearful. Whereas fearing is always in relation to something, 'that' which is feared; anxiety is "one of Dasein's possibilities of Being" (Heidegger, p. 227). Anxiety is a 'state-of-mind' when something of our own being is disclosed to us. Hence, Ella's anxiety in the 'nothingness' of her everyday is a self-disclosing of 'being old.'

Ella speaks of the anaesthetic having *to come out* and of thinking that she may be *in too much of a hurry* for things to *be alright*. The suddenness of having ‘nothing work’ prompts a questioning of whether what appears is from the phenomenon of being aged, or is it from something else? Ontically, the characteristics of aging are ‘known’ by their universality, of happening to everyone, as well as by their gradual progressiveness (Victor, 1987). Thus, the suddenness of Ella’s having nothing work, like Florence’s having ‘the stuffing knocked out’ of her, suggests it could be merely a semblance of being aged. Yet Ella’s experience of ‘being old’ endures even now after four months. She was thrown into being older in the *colossal-ness* of the event. Her already-there ‘being aged’ was “delivered over to” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 173) being old. ‘Oldness’ just happened. Yet ontologically, the complexity of how being aged may be revealed and concealed suggests the abruptness of ‘nothing working’ in this event may be both an announcing as well as a semblance of the phenomenon itself.

## A Reflection

Brought together in this chapter were anecdotes which illustrated moments of sudden unease while going about the familiar in a day. Heidegger speaks of the existential mode of ‘uncanniness’ or experiencing the ‘uncomfortableness of the unaccustomed.’ It is a mode of suddenly ‘not-being-at-home’ with how things are amid the ordinarily familiar. Interpreted in the context of being aged, the uncomfortableness is an experiencing of agedness which was ‘not there’ before. Although, what is revealed is that being aged was always already there but covered over by an everyday accustomedness. Thus being aged is announced in the midst of the unaccustomed uneasiness. The mildly intrusive uncomfortableness announces ‘getting older.’ The overwhelmingly uncomfortable is an announcing of being ‘old.’ Thus, being accustomed to things which are changed conceals the experience of being aged. Paradoxically, it is the taken-for-granted familiarity which holds the potential to reveal the unfamiliar.

Being aged is always already there.  
Concealed. Covered over  
in its ordinariness.  
Always present as Being-possible.

Being aged announces itself amid the everyday.  
There, between the what once was, the  
what is, and the what might yet be.  
Sometimes subtly, sometimes alarmingly uncomfortable.

Being aged is unknowable until announced  
as an on-show-ness  
in the being unsteady and the hesitating,  
as an alarmed-ness  
in the being nauseous,  
as a forgetfulness  
which hinders in the everyday,  
as a tiredness  
in the day that was never before too-much,  
as a fading away-ness  
in the picking up and the putting on.

The eventful not-at-homeness is a showing,  
thrusting being aged into being old.

Amid the familiar, experiencing the uncomfortableness  
of the unaccustomed is an announcing.

## **Chapter Nine: Aging Just Is**

Aging is part of life. Its natural occurrence means that, by virtue of living, each and every one of us exists toward being aged. It just happens. In the usual course of life it cannot, not happen. Aging is always already there within our human finiteness. Thus, as something which is unremitting, the being toward aging is present from the event of coming into the world to the moment of going out of it. Consequently, having already reached advanced age, the participants in this study were richly experienced in aging. Yet, rather than talk of aging coming to the fore within the research conversations, it was noticeably absent. When speaking about the everyday, there was a taken-for-granted-ness in the talk about aging. It was just there, as it has been. Accordingly, the anecdotes gathered together in this last findings chapter aim to illuminate the notion that ‘aging just is.’ Together they reveal something of the phenomenon of aging as experienced from the inside and when viewed from the outside. But rather than stripping aging of its mystery (Harman, 2007), the participants merely allude to what it is. Its wholeness remains in the shadows.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

Heideggerian phenomenology offers an understanding of what is meant by ‘aging just is.’ To reiterate, interpreting aging as a phenomenon implies “it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*...but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 59). Hence, “the being of [aging] is always absent; it labours silently in invisible depths” (Harman, 2007, p. 2). So saying aging ‘is’ means it exists phenomenally; “that it is really there among the all of things, that it occurs, that it can be found somewhere in the natural universe” (King, 2001, p. 12). Yet it does not have the substantiality of other things which are constantly present, like trees or the human body itself. However, we can know of aging’s existence. It can be known, or felt or

experienced in some way. Therefore aging is “evidently something and not nothing, although not a concrete sensible thing in the primary sense of the word” (King, p. 9).

Although the phenomenon of aging does not make itself manifest in readily knowable ways, it still ‘is.’ “But for the kind of thinking that Heidegger urges, the ‘is’ remains a mystery. It refers to a swirling, turbulent absence from visibility that can never be clearly defined. Everything that appears must have arisen from a deeper concealment” (Harman, 2007, p. 149). And the “concealment guards what is secret” (Harman, p. 93). Interpreted here, it means aging cannot be understood simply by its characteristics. Also, its subtleties and deep complexities mean what it is can never be entirely revealed or known. In explicating an ontological understanding of phenomena, Heidegger distinguishes three different forms of being. ‘That-being’ or “*that* something is” (Inwood, 1999, p. 26) refers to a thing’s existence. Whereas ‘What-being’ “says *what* something is...its essential features” (Inwood, p. 26). And thirdly, something can be understood ontologically in terms of its “How-being, its type, manner or mode of being” (Inwood, p. 27). In the context of this study, it means aging itself has a ‘that-ness,’ a ‘what-ness’ and a ‘how-ness.’ Furthermore, the ‘is’ of aging may only be encountered amid everyday dealings. Yet in saying this, “Heidegger thinks we encounter things mostly by taking them for granted” (Harman, p. 29). Thus in taking aging for granted we always already fail to look closely or explore its depths.

Certainly, the stories told in the course of this study indicated the mysteriousness of aging. The words and descriptions ‘hintingly’ allude to what aging is rather than articulating it clearly. Frequently the participants voiced a mode of ‘not-thinking’ about aging as they go about their everyday.

## **Letting It Be**

Frank’s story offers a rich illustration of how aging was so often referred to. When I asked Frank to tell me about being 97, he said:

*I am 97 and a half, don't forget the half. Like climbing a rope, you go up a foot and you hang on, so I've got to 97 and a half. It's only a number isn't it? It's like the sun and the tide. I can't stop them; you know they are going to come and go, come and go. Age is going to go on, so I just forget about it and let it do its own thing. I haven't worried about anything I have got no control over, like dying or whatever. When your time comes you drop so it's no good worrying about it. Nobody knows how long you will be around. And at home I am free to do what I want to, when I want to, and let age look after itself [Frank, 97].*

In saying *97 and a half* is *only a number*, Frank brings into language the ‘that-ness’ of aging. As he ‘is,’ so is his aging; one points to the other’s existence. There is nothing in particular ‘doing’ the aging, it “is just *happening*” (Crowe, 2006, p. 186). So the number, 97 and a half, merely stands for the fact that aging ‘is;’ it does not say what or how aging is. And in saying it is *like the sun and the tide* Frank discloses his knowing “that it is and has to be” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 174). Hence, the metaphor is Frank’s way of indicating the ‘that it is-ness’ of his aging. Phenomenally, “formal indication is a kind of knowledge that hints at some deeper reality....It is a way of making things present without making them present. It does this by means of suggestions, hints, or allusions to the being of things” (Harman, 2007, pp. 27-28). Using metaphorical symbolism is Frank’s way of expressing something he cannot explain directly. It is a thing that ‘won’t go into words.’

In saying he *just forgets about it*, Frank speaks of purposively not attending to the ‘is-ness’ of aging. His words indicate ‘not-letting’ aging come into the things he concerns himself with. Thus, in the midst of engaging in the everyday, aging is ordinarily outside the horizon of experience. Ontologically, ‘concern’ signifies a “possible way of Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 83). But rather than ‘forgetting’ about aging signifying a deficient mode of concern, being concerned also shows in “giving something up and letting it go” (Heidegger, p. 83). In accordance with this notion, Frank says he lets his

*age look after itself.* Thus he speaks of letting aging go. He lets it *do its own thing*. In forgetting about it and letting it go, Frank abandons himself to the thrownness of whatever aging brings. As such, forgetting is an everyday mode of concern which is a “just living along in a way which ‘lets’ everything ‘be’ as it is” (Heidegger, p. 396). Letting it be is therefore a ‘not interfering’ (Inwood, 1999). It is a releasing; a being free to not *worry* about aging. In letting it be, Frank is released into a mode of just doing *what he wants, when he wants*. So rather than worrying about his advancing age, Frank engages in attending to and looking after other things which draw his everyday concerns.

Similarly, Curly and Matelot speak of the just ‘is-ness’ of aging. However, their thinking throws a new light on letting it be:

*Being 97? Well I don’t know, 97. I am 97 and a half actually. I don’t think about it. I mean when I am feeling fit and so on the age doesn’t concern me. Well, it has got to the stage that my age has become commonplace to me. I just accept it. I don’t think about it anymore. Otherwise I would probably wake up and find myself dead [Curly, 97].*

*Being 74, well I don’t feel that way. I don’t think about it, you know. I just look to see what is going to happen tomorrow and that’s about it. I just keep ‘getting old’ out of my way of thinking because I have seen a lot of people die young. And I thought if I don’t think that I am old, I will probably live a bit longer or whatever [Matelot, 74].*

Both Curly and Matelot hark back to their *not thinking about* aging. Then Curly goes on to say if he did think about it he *would probably wake up and find himself dead*. In the same vein, Matelot suggests that by not thinking about it he *will probably live a bit longer*. Their words speak of a foreboding. They point to ‘knowing’ that ‘not letting it be’ might somehow invoke the potential for their own finiteness to be brought closer. Keeping aging out of the way of thinking is being in a mode of wanting to go along with things as they are. In relation to

‘coming-to-an-end,’ Heidegger (1927/1962) indicates that “any Dasein always exists in just such a manner that its ‘not-yet’ *belongs* to it....[However] the ‘not-yet’ diminishes as the concealing shadow disappears” (p. 287). Interpreted within this context, letting it be, is being in a mode of ‘not-yet.’ It points to not looking directly at aging’s inevitability. Yet this is surely the way for most people.

Margaret [80] tells of suddenly ‘seeing’ her mother as she looked in the mirror. She said *I almost jumped the other day. She was there looking at me as she was.* And as I listen to her words I find myself nodding in recognition. So I interpret the participants’ anecdotes as uncovering an awareness of a ‘diminishing not-yet’ as the coming to an end draws ever closer.

Furthermore, the anecdotes illuminate a determining to ‘not think’ about aging, rather than merely not being aware of aging from day to day. Hence, in advanced age, letting it be alludes to aging’s ‘just is-ness.’ But just as aging happens, so do embodied changes. Yet in conversation, the participants frequently voiced experiences such as *no, aging hasn’t made any difference [Curly, 97]*; and *nothing has changed really [Margaret, 80]*. They suggest taking aging for granted while remaining focused on doing the things they have always done or want to do. Along the way it seems embodied changes are ‘overlooked’ or taken into account.

## Taking Account of Aging

Madge did not ever have children. Although she has nieces and nephews, there is no-one she feels she can regularly call on. At 95 she lives on her own in a retirement unit. Madge told me she still drives and does her shopping:

*I did a short trip to get some ingredients for making the cake on Wednesday. It was a necessity trip, a quick one, not poking around. So I drove down to the shops and was able to park out on the beach frontage, by the toilets. There is mobility parking there. I didn’t get into that but I got one next to it. And walked to the post office and then I left there and drove back the other way, through the town centre, and I found a park to go to the chemist; only a query. And again I moved the car around to New World and got parking almost at the door. With the groceries I use a trundler*

*always, even if I am buying only a little bit. I use it for my walker. I hold onto it. If I have got bottled things, the bottled ones are heavy. Lemonade, milk, all those are heavy. So I took the trundler right to the car.*

*Then I came around to the vegetable shop on the other side. I drove right to the back of that where I can usually find a mobility park just about at the door to walk into the shop. Getting in and out of my car doesn't worry me, it just doesn't worry me. It is the walking upright, the feet mostly. My feet are a big worry at the moment because I can't walk very well. But it wasn't a hurry [Madge, 95].*

In her story Madge describes going to the post office, the chemist, the supermarket and the vegetable shop. She recounts the detail of her shopping trip and, in the telling, the ‘how’ of going shopping is revealed. Toward the end of her story, Madge happens to mention it is *the walking upright, the feet mostly* which are her *big worry*. This disclosure reveals the meaning behind Madge’s way of going about her shopping. As she tells of the *not poking around* trip, the *moving her car* from shop to shop, the seeking out *mobility parks* and the *parking almost at the door*, Madge’s words speak of taking account of her aging. In so doing, her ‘not walking very well’ does not stand in the way of getting the *necessities*. “Not counting on...is a mode of taking into account what one cannot hold on to” (King, 2001, p. 260). In other words, with not being able to count on her walking, Madge finds a way of reckoning with that which is no longer there for her. Yet this taking account of not walking upright is more than a way of getting the necessities. “Dasein always assigns itself from a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ to the ‘with-which’ of an involvement” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 119). Interpreted here, Madge’s taking account of not walking well is for the sake of remaining in her current home. Hence the ‘with-which,’ the everyday mode of taking account of things, is primordially a reckoning with carrying on her life as it is.

Likewise, Madge’s *using a trundler* is a way of reckoning with the heaviness of the things she buys. Her taking account of things is further revealed

as she tells of *always* using a trundler, even when buying *only a little bit*. Like the driving from shop to shop, using the trundler *for her walker* is a way of reckoning with her not walking upright. Heidegger (1927/1962) purports that “when we let something be involved, it must be involved in something; and in terms of this ‘in-which’, the ‘with-which’ of this involvement is freed (pp. 117-118). In other words, Madge lets the trundler be involved in her reckoning with her not walking very well. Accordingly, the trundler as a walker is also involved for the sake of carrying on in her retirement unit. Thus the taking account of things is a circumspect way of reckoning with change. “Dasein is in charge of its How-being, not its That-being” (Inwood, 1999, p. 60). Taking account is, therefore, a mode of ‘How-being’ in the everyday in advanced age. Madge has no control over when her own end will come but she can be circumspect in her day-to-day dealings with things.

Taking the interpretation a step further, Harman’s (2007) ontological understanding of a deeply hidden phenomenon, unseen in its silent existence, provides a way of illuminating the ‘how-ness’ of aging itself. Madge’s story alludes to aging being almost imperceptible in its ‘continuousness.’ Hence the How-being of aging is its ‘uninterrupted-ness;’ invisibly connecting one moment in time to the next. This interpretation shows in Madge’s disclosure at another moment in the conversation in which she said *I still don’t believe it; my age has just grown on me*. As such, the call for taking account of aging seems to arise from the ‘invisible depths,’ rather than coming from a conscious decision to change the way of doing things.

Yet while the participants illustrated an understanding of agedness through dwelling in the everyday, some spoke of encounters with others as revealing different interpretations of what aging is.

### **Being Aged not Old**

When I met with Merrill she was almost at the end of her year-long series of treatments for a cancer. She said the medical people *all know Merrill*. And they would say *oh Merrill, are you here again?* In this anecdote she tells of a recent encounter:

*Oh, no it doesn't seem like 89 because I keep doing things and people don't think I should be that age. When I was having the third operation the nurse said to me one day, what do you do all day? And I said well my mother lived to a hundred and five and I might live as long as her so perhaps I should keep doing things, and so I still mow my lawns. And she said to me oh people over 80 don't do that sort of thing, they are all on medication. So I said well I don't have any medication. So she couldn't believe that really.*

*I think that aging is what people make it. I have got half an acre here and I do all the garden. So long as it is fine I still go out most days for a while, doing something. I was out in the garden a couple of days ago. I had a look to see if I had any tomatoes left. I have got grapefruit at the moment and mandarins and things like that. I went around with my basket bringing in whatever I could collect, silverbeet and so forth. Yes, I am just used to doing things. I don't think it has stopped me doing anything. But the age is getting a bit more into my back; more now I am getting older [Merrill, 89].*

Merrill says *it doesn't seem like* she is 89. Her words speak of not reconciling the factual age she is with how it appears to her. There is an estrangement between being and seeming the age she is. Not 'seeming' her age suggests she already knows what being 89 ought to be like. Merrill elucidates her experience further by saying it is *because* she *keeps doing things*. Thus she points to presupposing that 89 would be a time of 'not keeping on doing things.' Accordingly she says *people don't think* she *should be that age*. She speaks of no-one in particular but 'people' in general. Her words suggesting a generalised, public understanding of aging already exists. She 'knows' that others also characterise 89 as a time of 'not keeping on doing things.' In this way, she reveals listening "*away to the 'they'*" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 316). In the 'idle chatter' of others "everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, genuinely taken

hold of, genuinely spoken, though at bottom it is not" (Heidegger, p. 217). Hence, what seems to be informed understanding is merely hearsay but it still gets passed on from one to another through everyday talk. So much that seems real in this public conversation is false (Harman, 2007). The voice of the 'they' also shows as the nurse asks *what* she does *all day* as if assuming Merrill will not have enough to do. It shows in her asserting that *people over 80* don't still mow their lawns. Thus, in chatting with Merrill, the nurse projects the hearsay about aging into her conversation.

Then as Merrill goes on to describe *being out in the garden*, she comments on the *age getting into her back* now she is *getting older*. Her words 'getting older' allude to being 89 as being not yet old. As explored earlier in the chapter, the 'not-yet' is "that which is constantly still outstanding" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 286). Hence, a mode of 'getting older' stands apart from 'being old.' Getting older is merely in the direction of oldness. However, by saying getting older is 'not-yet' old, it suggests being old is still to come; that it will happen in the future. But the possibility of being old and it being an inevitable consequence of aging are perhaps different things. To illustrate, Frank's words are offered:

*I don't have time to get old. I still haven't. I have lived on my own since 1997 when my wife died. When the weather's fine I'm normally out in the garden and gardening never ends. There is always something to do. Wet days of course I catch up inside; housework, ironing and whatever. I just finished my ironing yesterday but the time before I had three lots of washing I had to iron so there were about 14 shirts, then there's baking to do [Frank, 97].*

As he talks of *not having time to get old* Frank articulates an association between being engaged in his everyday and the absence of oldness. He speaks of *always having something to do* as standing in the way of 'getting old.' And when he says he is *normally out in the garden and gardening never ends*, Frank points to the possibility of not-yet-old as remaining outstanding provided he is still gardening. Thus, at 97, Frank expresses an everyday experience of being aged not

old. To further uncover how compellingly this notion showed across the anecdotes, Ferguson's words are added:

*I don't know whether I am old now but I can't do a lot of the things I want to do. It is hard to say. I am getting older. I have known that for about four or five years. I feel as if I want to go out. I would be better off out. But I don't know what's on that end either, it might be worse. Eh? It might be still the same thing. You don't know what it is. I have seen plenty die but I have never died myself [Ferguson, 97].*

Like Merrill and Frank, he speaks of 'getting' older. And in his wondering whether he *is old now* at 97, Ferguson also grounds his knowing in terms of his engagement in the everyday. Yet even in the face of not being able to *do a lot of the things he wants to do*, and thinking he *would be better off out* of the world, Ferguson still stops short of saying he is old. Interpreted existentially, the 'not-yet' of oldness may be constantly outstanding to the end. Thus the 'what-ness' of aging is its mysteriousness.

While, overwhelmingly, the participants spoke of not being old, I asked if they felt other people ever encountered them as if they were old. Christina's story was one of the few disclosed:

*I play accompaniment for a choir on Friday mornings. One Friday we went to a residential home for the elderly and they had an elevator there; a very slow elevator for the residents. When the concert was finished I thought I will go down the stairs, that elevator is too slow. But a lady in our choir who uses a stick, and who is younger than I am, came over to me and said would you like some help down the stairs dear. And I thought well not really, and I didn't have a stick. So I said to her thank you very much but I have fourteen stairs at home.*

*People may sometimes, out of kindness and thoughtfulness, take my arm as if I can't move alone. That sort of thing makes me feel*

*old. I think oh well, they think poor old thing, she is old. It is very kind of them. So I just have to accept it [Christina, 93].*

Christina tells of leaving the recital at the *residential home* which she says is *for the elderly*. Yet Christina herself is 93, an age which likely surpassed some of the residents she was there to entertain. Hence, in saying for the ‘elderly’ she alludes to the residents as being ‘older’ in an everyday mode, rather than suggesting they are more advanced in years. Without referring to any particular age, elderly can be defined as “bordering on old age” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 363). When Christina mentions the rest home’s *elevator* is *too slow* she speaks of not being ‘old’ enough for need of its slowness. Christina’s deciding to *go down the stairs* ‘shows’ she is not yet elderly.

But her going to the stairs still attracts notice and draws an offer of *help*. It suggests that Christina’s age was taken by the other as an indicator of her need for assistance. And she is at pains to point out that the *younger* lady *uses a stick*; whereas she herself does *not have a stick*. In Christina’s eyes, not having a stick announces her not being elderly enough to need one. Thus, she discloses a sense of irony in the moment; a bemusement that an offer of help should come from someone who already uses a stick to walk. And in pointing out she has *fourteen stairs at home*, Christina speaks of not wanting to be treated as if she is already old. It is only when the choir lady comes to help that Christina’s deep sense of not being old, and therefore of not wanting to be helped, shows itself. Her indignance reveals the incongruence of how the choir lady sees her and how she understands herself.

In the moment, each interprets the other’s ‘oldness’ according to the facts which simply lie before them. To one, the older age announces being old; to the other, the walking stick shows oldness. However, “the ‘that-it-is’ of facticity never becomes something that we can come across by beholding it” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 174). This is interpreted as meaning that oldness can never be understood merely by looking at its features from the outside. Hence, being old is only ever encountered existentially in “the midst of life” (Harman, 2007, p. 29). Paradoxically though, Christina says this *sort of thing makes her feel old*. Her

words speak of oldness being brought into existence by way of others. Heidegger proposes that “Dasein ‘knows’ what it is itself capable of...[but has] been so absorbed in the ‘they’ that it has let such possibilities be presented to it by the way in which the ‘they’ has publicly interpreted things” (p. 315). Accordingly, Christina reveals a ‘listening away’ to other’s words and actions which bring about her experience of ‘feeling old.’ Yet Christina still ‘knows’ what she herself is capable of. She experiences herself as being aged not old.

## A Reflection

In this last of four findings chapters, the anecdotes which allude to the simultaneous naturalness and mysteriousness of aging were illuminated. Heidegger’s ontological view of phenomena brought an interpretive richness. Phenomenally, aging can be understood in terms of its ‘that-being,’ its ‘what-being’ and its ‘how-being.’ In the everyday, aging is ordinarily something which does not show itself. Aging is just there. It usually remains hidden amid the taken-for-granted. In the everyday in advanced age it is forgotten about. Aging is let be to do its own thing. Yet always aging labours invisibly toward its natural end. Thus amid the experience of things seeming the same in advanced age, aging happens. For the sake of carrying on with everyday things, aging is ordinarily taken account of. ‘Getting older’ in years is therefore not the same thing as ‘being’ old in the everyday. Aging is, for the most part, being ‘not-yet-old.’

Aging is that it is, its  
that-being, the that-ness of aging is  
that it exists, it is something in this natural world  
not nothing,  
that it is and has to be means aging happens,  
forgetting about it in the everyday is  
a letting it be

Aging is how it is, its  
how-being, the how-ness of aging is  
how it is in an everyday way, its how is  
its continuing-ness  
almost imperceptible, the taking account of  
how it is is a reckoning with aging  
for the sake of carrying on

Aging is what it is, its  
what-being, the what-ness of aging is  
its essentialness,  
what aging essentially is, what it is is not  
its facticity, its facts are known yet it is only understood  
amid everyday events, agedness is a  
not-yet-oldness.

Aging just is

## **Chapter Ten: The Meaning of Being Aged**

This chapter signifies the end of a beginning. It is but a point in time within the continual movement of interpreting the meanings within the research text. I stand here reminded of Heidegger's (1927/1962) words; "to think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky" (p. 4). This is a point of relative stillness amid the tossing and turning movements in coming to understand. It is a confining of thoughts to wondering 'what is the meaning of being aged?' Coming to this single thought is the purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study (Heidegger). Dwelling on this one question is a gazing at the textual 'sky,' a stepping back to see things in their wholeness; a time of deep wondering about that which shines most brightly amid a galaxy of understandings. It is a distilling of the meaning of being aged from all that was said and not said, and from all that was thought and that which will come into thought as I write.

The elders who gifted their time and stories to this study were ordinary people living ordinary lives in the midst of their own communities. Their ordinary, daily environments were the places we met in conversation. And in the talk, I encouraged the telling of ordinary, everyday stories. Yet the word 'ordinary' is not spoken in denigration. Amid the seeming simplicity of the ordinary day in advanced age, infinite layers of complexity were announced. I travelled this research journey being open to 'hearing' and to understanding something of that which was not self evident; the ontology of 'being aged.' Thinking back I seemed to be in a perpetual state of wonderment. Each time, entering into the space of a participant's usual world was like stepping into a 'treasure-house;' a place where "highly valued things are kept" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 1196). The things ordinary to each person and each space appeared to me uniquely extraordinary and called forth my wondering. Each thing, each moment, told its own story; approaching down the pathway darkened

by overhanging creepers, gazing upon the wheelbarrow storing firewood in the lounge, noticing the piano taking up much of the room, looking into the tiny black and white photographs. And there was an unspoken wonderfulness which radiated from within each person; it showed in the eyes, the smile, the hands. It was extraordinary how much I was drawn to ‘hear.’

Reflecting back to my being with elder clients as an occupational therapist, and doing the routine home visits, I feel somewhat alarmed by the things I now know I failed to notice. They were things which would likely have opened up more informed understandings of the people, their environments and their everyday occupations. I imagine it would have led to more meaningful ‘interventions.’ I wonder anew. What was it that made ‘being-with’ elders in the context of this study so profoundly different? In the throes of reflecting I experience an intense understanding of being changed. It is different because I am different. Fiumara’s (1990) words leap from the page; “unless we are prepared to become in some way different from what we are, listening cannot be understood” (p. 165). Perhaps it was my readiness for vulnerability in stepping into the unknown which cleared the way for me to become different.

I have been touched by the struggling to understand the ‘at-first-mystical’ writings of Heidegger. And I have been touched by the turbulence of thinking in the way of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Is this what Heidegger means by ‘Dasein?’ Is this what ‘Being-the open’ feels like? Perhaps the openness was always already there within me, calling me to this study. Yet it was the learning to be in the way of an interpretive phenomenological researcher which opened up broader and deeper possibilities for me. It was the learning to listen to the texts; the spoken, the unspoken, the written, the visual and the interpretive. It was the listening which delivered me over to ‘hearing’ that which was ordinarily hidden to me. Perhaps not being there to ‘do’ something, as in the doing that practice calls for, cleared the way. On the whole, it seems my new mode of being a listener opened up a wonderfulness of being-with the elders in the context of this study. The listening moved me beyond the anonymities cast by my already-there presuppositions about aging and the aged. Out of the listening grew thinking.

## The Deep Soil

“In order to think, one must rise from the deep soil of a homeland”  
 (Harman, 2007, p. 150).

Always, the ‘deep soil’ from which the thinking stemmed was that of the elders’ stories. All interpretations are of this rich soil. Here, dwelling upon the meaning of being aged, I aim to unveil the harmony between the study’s textual parts and the interpretive whole. What is represented in the previous four findings chapters reveals the parts of thinking. This dwelling was a mode of letting the anecdotal text speak in its own way; a mode of being receptive to what it was saying. It was a dialogic mode of letting questions come from the text and of posing questions to it. It was an interpretive mode of coming to understand through letting the texts’ ‘truths’ be seen. On the way, each part projected its own understandings toward the unfolding meaning of the whole. As described in the philosophical underpinnings, this movement within the hermeneutic circle was always a being in flux towards the hesitancy of a fuller understanding. In confining my thoughts to the question of overarching meaning, the thinking is a mode of letting the phenomenon of being aged be what it ‘is’ in the everyday rather than trying to reduce it to a cluster of concepts (Harman, 2007). Hence, in coming to understand the meaning of being aged I ask “what endures?” “What is the same in the everyday in advanced age no matter what?”

## The Ordinary

What comes into thought is this; the meaning of being aged is its ordinariness within the everyday. That is, its meaning is in how being aged is the ordinary. To grasp this notion more fully, I first turn back to the word’s origins. ‘Ordinary’ comes from the Latin noun ‘ordo’ meaning ‘order’ (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982; Sandywell, 2004). Beyond meanings of sequence, order is a “state of efficiency...[an] absence of confusion or disturbance; [the] established state of things, [or a] general constitution of the world” (Hayward & Sparkes, p. 802). Within the research text the language which alludes to ordinariness circles in and around such words as *routine*, *usually*, *the same*, *I always*, *I still* and *I am*. The ordinary is how things are. According to Sandywell the ordinary is what is ‘real.’

In this way he points to the ordinary as being the mundane; of belonging to this world. Hence, the ordinary is that which is entrenched in the circumstances and practical rituals of the everyday (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995). Being aged is the ordinary.

### **The Ordinariness of Being Aged**

Each of the participants in this study had experienced a lot of that which has gone before. Many more yesterdays lay in their past than did tomorrows in their future. This is the order of the finiteness of being human. As such, becoming aged is in itself ordinary in that it is unremarkable. Being aged is being in the continuance of a whole life. Frank expressed the simpleness of this complex, natural phenomenon through metaphor when he said *it's like the sun and the tide. I can't stop them; you know they are going to come and go, come and go. Age is going to go on...Nobody knows how long you will be around.* The ordinariness of being aged is in the always already being towards a horizon which stretches out in front of the everyday. Being aged is like being in the ‘offing;’ being in life somewhere “beyond the half-way line between the coast and the horizon” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 793). Heidegger (1927/1962) speaks of the “stretching-along. The ‘between’ which relates to birth and death already lies *in the Being of Dasein*” (p. 426). Yet, in the midst of ‘nobody knowing’ how far away it is, there is the order of knowing one is always moving towards the indistinct horizon. Being aged will go on until it goes no further. In Heideggerian terms, “Dasein traverses the span of time granted to it between the two boundaries...between birth and death” (Heidegger, p. 425). This continuousness of aging underpins the ordinariness of being aged. Curly alluded to this when he commented, *I am 97 and a half actually...well, it has got to the stage that my age has become commonplace to me. I just accept it. I don't think about it anymore.* The continuousness of aging shrouds the facticity of being ‘aged.’ It seems that the longer one’s life goes on, the more being aged is taken-for-granted. In Tom’s words, how things are, no matter how they are changed, is *just the way it is.*

Yet a paradox is revealed. It is the apparent contradiction of experiencing, at the same time, both an ordinariness and an extraordinariness of being in

advanced age. Curly's age comes into his thinking and through into conversation but he experiences 'not-thinking' about it. The eldest participants in this study were particular about the age they 'actually' were. Just as Curly pointed to having lived an extra half year, Frank reminded me he was *97 and a half* and not to *forget the half*. While being aged becomes usual, there is a knowing when one's agedness goes 'beyond the ordinary.' In a similar way, Madge highlighted the extraordinary nature of her continuing-ness when she spoke aloud the names of those who had already 'gone' before her; *Gosh what a lot eh? And all those in that row, they've all gone.* In her discursive analysis of elders' conversations, Jones' (2006) interprets this way of talking as a 'positioning.' Rounding up the actual age, adding on the extra months or illuminating one's longevity makes an advanced age more noteworthy. The speaker wants the listener to hear the difference as significant (Jones). Curly and Frank are no longer merely 97-year-olds. In ordinary words they signify the extraordinariness of being towards 98. Taking pride in being advanced in age is noted in other studies (Clarke & Warren, 2006; Nilsson et al., 2000). But beyond the age being pointed to occasionally in conversations during this study, the anecdotal text suggests the extraordinariness of being in advanced age remains mostly in the shadows of the everyday. On the whole, the elders talked about their lives and not their age.

Aging just happens. Thus, the ordinariness of aging means the facticity of one's age is not readily reconciled. Recall Merrill's declaring, *oh, no it doesn't. seem like 89* and Matelot's reflecting, *74, well I don't feel that way.* Ontologically, although one's experience of 'the now' is always changing "the Self maintains itself throughout with a certain selfsameness" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 425). By 'selfsameness,' Heidegger refers to the connectedness of everyday experiences through time. Amid the always-changing is that which endures. The 'connectedness of life' is in that which perseveres (Heidegger). Petry (2003) interpreted 'becoming aged' as going on mostly unnoticed in life, giving rise to a sense of surprise when participants 'found' they had 'grown old.' In the same vein, Kaufman (2000) suggests "*aging per se is not a substantive issue*" (p. 109) in the context of elders' understanding of who they are. Her participants knew they were aged but their identity was not constructed around a feeling of 'now I

am in old age.' Rather they understood themselves through a continuity of already established 'themes' of engaging in life. Accordingly, Kaufman's theory of the 'ageless self' is underpinned by the notion that "identity is built around themes, without regard to time, as past experiences are symbolically connected to one another" (p. 104). In this study, a parallel may be drawn with the words which disclose 'who I am in what I do.' For example, remember Matelot indicating *because I am a kaumataua, I go and do those things* and Mary noting *I am the one at church who sends all the cards*. Purportedly, such thematic continuity is central to experiencing contentment, irrespective of the losses and limitations that come with age (Kaufman).

Being chronologically 'aged' emerged from this study's text as something wholly distinct from being ontologically 'old.' At first it struck me as extraordinary that being 95 or 97 was not old. Yet as each subsequent conversation unfolded, I came to hear an ordinariness of living with the 'dailiness' of being aged. Across the popular and academic literature, an 'as lived' distinction between 'agedness' and 'oldness' appears again and again. The language varies from text to text yet tells the same story (Andrews, 1999; Busch, 1991; Clarke & Warren, 2006; Cremin, 1992; Fowler & McCutcheon, 1991; Jones, 2006; Kaufman, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2000; Petry, 2003; Thompson, 1993). Going on the strength of this remarkably commonplace finding, those who are aged in years ordinarily do not experience 'being' old even if sometimes they 'feel' old. By 90 years of age, Heikkinen (2004) proposes that the meaning of bodily change wanes and is less visible. As she interpreted, the participants' becoming accustomed to aging was a matter of learning to be old.

Nevertheless, what is ordinary to the one who is aged can seem extraordinary to others. When looked upon from the outside, being aged seems to be the same as being old. Remember Christina saying how *a lady in our choir who uses a stick, and who is younger than I am, came over to me and said would you like some help down the stairs dear*. To the choir lady, Christina's age signified her being old enough to need assistance. But focusing on the ontic features of aging, a merely seeing what is present, over-shadows the ontological nature of 'being aged.' In a similar way, Clarke and Warren's (2006) participants

spoke of being expected to “behave like an ‘old person’” (p. 62). However, such experiences simply reveal the allurement of how we ordinarily take the meaning of things for granted (Heidegger, 1927/1962). According to Heidegger, “all things withdraw from human view into a shadowy background, even when we stare directly at them” (Harman, 2007, p. 1). The nurse showed a ‘taken-for-grantedness’ that being aged means not doing much when she inquired of Merrill, *what do you do all day?* We can only surmise how different the conversation with a client might be were a practitioner to be in a mode of ‘listening,’ rather than of merely speaking. In ‘not-listening,’ the essence of things remains in the shadowy background. Perhaps the more visible or more notable ‘the age’ becomes, the more deeply the meaning of being aged is concealed in the taken-for-granted.

Within a year of completing the research conversations, three of the study’s participants had passed away. Yet talk of death or dying was most noticeable by its relative silence. On the few occasions it did arise, being towards death was always spoken of in philosophical terms. The text reveals an acceptedness of, and on two occasions a readiness for, going out of the world. Ferguson mused, *I don’t know whether I am old now but I can’t do a lot of the things I want to do. It is hard to say. I am getting older...I feel as if I want to go out. I would be better off out.* Only a matter of weeks after he spoke these words, Ferguson did ‘go out.’ His ponderings suggest an ordinariness of being aged as a being towards death (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Elders’ acceptance of, and absence of pre-occupation with, death is uncovered in other studies (Clarke & Warren, 2007; Heikkinen, 2004; Howarth, 1998; Pascucci & Loving, 1997). Heikkinen’s longitudinal findings suggest being at ease with one’s finiteness deepens with becoming older. Furthermore, Ferguson’s words reflect how this study’s participants understood not being able to do the things one wants to do as ‘getting older.’ As such, getting older meant a being closer to death. In the literature, being ‘really’ old is equated with death (Clarke & Warren). Grenier (2006) concluded that “making meaning of frailty seems to imply making meaning of death and the end of self” (p. 308). It seems, for the most part, ‘Being-towards-death’ in advanced age is a being in an everyday ordinariness.

## Being in Ordinariness

Being in the ordinary day in advanced age was the focus of my conversations with elders. In the talk was a fluidity of movement, to and fro, forwards and backwards, between a particular story and the usual story of the everyday. The ordinary so often clouded the particular. Thus, the usual way events were talked about pointed to being in the everyday as a ‘being in ordinariness.’ Ordinariness characterises being in the habitual day. This type of day holds the things ordinarily attended to and the accustomed ways of doing. Coming into the ordinary day signifies that which is expected. There is an anticipation of encountering that which is usually encountered. Hence, everyday ordinariness is grounded in routine-ness. Being in a routine shows the way; it reveals what has already been and it points to what is yet to come. Recall how Clark emphasised *my life is routine. It has got to be routine or otherwise if something happens and it's out of routine I have got to think hard as to what I am supposed to be doing.* Being in a mode of routine-ness is illuminated as a comfortable, embodied ordinariness. It calls for less thinking. It draws less. It opens up more space for doing everyday things. As Frank disclosed, being in a routine means the body *knows what to do.* Thus, routine-ness offers “a sustaining matrix” (Sandywell, 2004, p. 164). It stabilises; it holds things steady. In the potential everyday flux of being aged, the ordinariness of being in a routine proffers a sense of certainty. In Heideggerian (1927/1962) terms, ‘being-at-home’ is the announcing of being in ordinariness. Falling into a daily routine may be more salient in the context of being aged when other temporally-defined markers, as with parenting and ‘working,’ are absent.

Notions of continuity in advanced age line up with the interpretation of being in the everyday as a being in ordinariness. Atchley (1989) proposes an engagement in the familiar is comforting and provides a sense of order and direction in advanced age. “We find older people using familiar skills to do familiar things in familiar places in the company of familiar people” (Atchley, p. 188). Paradoxically however, routine-ness conceals the complexity of doing the ordinary. Tom’s story of *yesterday* pointed to the latent extraordinariness of his ordinary day which began when he *got up at about 8 o’clock and organised*

*Rosie's medication.* More than any other, this anecdote alluded to the camouflaging affect of being in a mode of routine-ness. The multiplicity and diversity of the many 'little' things done in a day are hidden behind the familiar routine. It is only when the ordinariness withdraws that the extraordinary complexity of going about the mundane is illuminated. Remember Frank disclosing, *if I go up to my daughter's I'm living from a carry bag or a suitcase and I forget to do this, or I forget to do that.* In the absence of contextual ordinariness Frank's routine is unravelled. The usual way of being in the day is lost. Theoretically speaking, "new environments can thus confront us with a drastic drop in our capacity to use habits to deal with mundane tasks of everyday living" (Atchley, p. 188). In accord with this study, what appears ordinary in the midst of routine-ness is unveiled as extraordinarily complex; yet still somehow 'simple.'

Furthermore, routine-ness in being aged finds its own embodied rhythm. Rhythm is movement characterised by a "regular alternation of strong and weak" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 986). A rhythmical flow in the ordinary day appears as an alternating quickness and slowness in the going from one thing to another. Indicators of a lived rhythm are there, yet unspoken, within the anecdotal text. Recall Curly's saying *yesterday, after my nap I made a cup of tea and started preparation for my evening meal. Then I played some music.* The text reveals an alternation of doing the restorative, the necessary and the enjoyable. It is an alternating of embodied movement and stillness. Interpreting being aged and being in a rhythmical ordinariness of the everyday did not appear in the literature I turned to. Perhaps it is so ordinary it remains in the shadows. Or perhaps a preoccupation with what elders do and how they spend their time means the rhythmical nature of 'being in' the everyday is covered over.

Being in the ordinary day is a being in trivialness. The ordinary becomes more and more trivial. Again, the words are not spoken in denigration. I draw on the etymological meaning. The trivial is that which "may be met with anywhere...[or is] of small account" (Hoad, 1993). It is the commonplace. Its foundations lie in the Latin *tri*, a place where roads meet, and *via*, a means, manner, journey or "by way of" (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982, p. 1248). Thus I

interpret being aged as being ‘in’ trivialness. It is a day-to-day journeying through being concerned with that which is fundamental to being human. Trivialness in the everyday is being concerned with the mundane; doing the things essential to being and belonging in the world. That ‘of small account’ which appears in the anecdotal text is in the talk of things like *washing, getting breakfast, doing the housework, ironing, mowing the lawn and chopping the wood*. Doing the trivial is doing that which sustains. It appears in Madge’s description of the *short trip to get some ingredients for making the cake on Wednesday. It was a necessity trip, a quick one, not poking around*. Behind the doing is the taking account of things which are lost or which can no longer be counted on such as walking upright or strength. And it seems that, at the end of the day, trivialness and the taking account of things is for the sake of sustaining one’s life as it ordinarily is. The participant anecdotes revealed a ‘carrying on-ness’ in carrying on. There was an attentiveness to continuing to do that which was usually done. Similarly, Petry (2003) interpreted her participants as wanting “to do and continue to do what they have always done” (p. 56). It seems embodied changes become the ordinary as elders live with them (Heikkinen, 2004). And increasingly with advancing age, one’s own everyday becomes the focus. By the time they reached 90, Heikkinen interpreted her participants as concentrating on “existence for its own sake” (p. 579).

A mode of trivialness also showed in the participants’ talk of the everyday entanglement in interests such as *reading, writing, playing solitaire, doing the crossword, listening to music, playing the piano, gardening or going to church*. These were the ordinary, familiar things which disclose ‘who I am.’ The doing was almost always within and about the home or immediate neighbourhood. Yet what may seem to be ‘of small account’ from the outside, appears in the text as bringing meaning ‘by way of’ doing the things which one is drawn to. Being engaged in that which is deeply interesting or gratifying makes being in the everyday worthwhile. Thus, an engaged-ness in the trivial is far from ‘trivialised’ in the everyday experience of being aged. Several other studies highlight a mundaneness of being engaged in everyday activities. Clarke and Warren (2007) considered the sense of contentment gained “from ‘ordinary’ everyday activities

that most take for granted" (p. 472). Being actively engaged was interpreted as passing time and keeping the mind active (Clarke & Warren). Likewise, elders' busyness with 'leisure' activities is highlighted by Thompson (1993). He comments on the "remarkable diversity in the extent of such activities" (Thompson, p. 687). Almost a decade later, Heikkinen (2004) mentions her surprise at participant's creativity and level of engagement. Neither author unveils the thinking behind the words. Why is elders' engaged-ness in the everyday is so striking or seemingly extraordinary it is worthy of special notice? The words point to taken-for-granted presuppositions about what the everyday might hold in advanced age.

Being aged as ushering in an ordinariness to different ways of 'being-with-Others' was also unveiled. Here, anecdotes told by the Maori participants brought forward a textual enrichment. This is not to say the meanings are exclusive to the indigenous voice. However, the hermeneutic notion of historicity suggests a pathway through life in the context of New Zealand's colonisation will have its own bearing. Recall Pani's story of going 'home:' *They introduced themselves and I knew straight away who they were; they were my relatives...It was so overwhelming. I think because, for the first time, I was on the marae. They told me it was mine. When I say mine, I mean I am involved with the family.* Profoundly, in finding his people Pani finds belonging. He 'finds' himself as Maori through being in the place of his ancestors. Phenomenally, we know ourselves through 'being-with' others (Heidegger, 1927/1962). "To be fully human is to live with relatedness" (Ackermann, 1998, p. 20). Remember May's story of her 'moko' dropping in; *I was so pleased because they all came here and I fed them and I felt proud of that... Well, there might be a time when they have got a family of their own and they do the same thing as I did for them yesterday.* May came to know herself as 'elder,' as grandmother, through being there for the sake of her grandchildren and their future. It is a being in relationship with the past and the future; of preserving and passing on cultural traditions.

Ordinarily, the longer one's own life goes on the more family, friends and loved ones will be 'missing' from the everyday. Regardless, Being-in-the-world is always a being in relationship (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Clark's story is a poignant

reminder of this. He told of going every day to be in the place where the pohutukawa trees were specially planted, to the place where his wife's ashes lie; *I go down there and I think back about all the pleasant times that we have had together. She might have been gone five years now but I still miss her.* Being in 'this' place is a being-with his wife. Being with her in this way, he still knows himself as a husband. Even when alone, or 'left behind,' we understand our selves more completely through the 'gaze' of the other (Ackermann, 1998; Heikkinen, 2004). Heikkinen's longitudinal findings suggest reaching 90 years of age means "the presence of others, dead or alive, is heightened" (p. 577). Hence, being aged may illuminate the humanness of 'being-with' through the relatedness which endures.

Being with others in 'remembering' could be interpreted as 'living in the past.' However, repeatedly the participants' anecdotes suggested a temporal ordinariness of being at the same time in the past, present and future. Memories show that which relates to the past is not 'gone.' Merrill's story of being drawn to play 'Buttons and Bows' is illustrative of this: *I missed out a few notes here and there. I played for the men at the war sometimes so I used to play a lot. The French used to get me to play Chopin.* The comfortableness of having memories of what has gone before suddenly appear, for no apparent reason, suggests a mode of letting the past come into the present. We heard Christina's bemusement in recalling having *salt instead of sugar* on her porridge and Curly's *remembering the names of all the teachers.* Other studies note a similar phenomenon. More so at 90 than 80, memories of the past filter through into thoughts and conversations (Heikkinen, 2004). Fischer, Norberg and Lundman (2007) suggest the stillness of resting opens the way for memories to float back. One of their participants told how the memories rolled up like watching a movie when lying awake at night (Fischer et al.). Phenomenally, people and events from the past can still be 'present' when they influence being in the everyday (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Being-with others in remembering seems just part of the ordinariness of being aged.

## Irruptions to Ordinariness

Being aged means being in ordinariness is the usual mode of being in the day. Ontologically, agedness is announced in eruptions to ordinariness. That which is irruptive, bursts in or invades suddenly (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982). Heidegger uses the German *einbruch* to signify a breaking in which is violent, “sometimes translated as ‘irruption’” (Harman, 2007, p. 80). Thus, “where the ordinary is exemplified by commonplace phenomena that are taken for granted and unnoticed, the extraordinary marks the disturbing eruption of the rare” (Sandywell, 2004, p. 162). Strangely enough, it is the ordinariness which holds the potential to illuminate a ‘not-at-homeness’ in the everyday (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Throughout the anecdotal text, experiences of not-being-at-home appeared amid the talk of going about the very familiar. The not-at-homeness appeared in the text which spoke of unfamiliar feelings like *hesitating, feeling nauseous* and *a bit tired*. It was disclosed in the flow of a story rather than as the purpose of the story itself. During our conversation Ferguson happened to notice his dressing gown on the chair and said *I tried to put it on the other day. I had a hell of a time getting it on. And when I did get it on it was too bloody heavy and yet I have worn it all my life.* In the event, his being weaker is announced. His marked loss of strength comes ‘home to him’ in the eventful moment of not-being-at-home in his dressing gown. The ‘strength’ is suddenly visible in its absence. Perhaps in the taking account of things which can no longer be counted on, what was momentarily extraordinary evolves into a ‘new’ ordinariness.

The phenomenon of ‘not-at-homeness’ as an announcing was not uncovered elsewhere in the literature. Heikkinen (2004) equates elders’ ‘unsettledness’ to not-being-at-home and describes ‘being-at-home’ as evident in elders’ “routine actions, [and] routine choices” (p. 580). Thus she uses Heidegger’s words yet I feel she fails to grapple with its phenomenal complexity.

It appears the more irruptive the extraordinariness is, the more ‘oldness’ is announced. Few such experiences were revealed in this research text. When they did appear, being old was always spoken of in terms of a particular event or moment. Recall Ella saying *I had a hip replacement and that is when I felt old. I have felt old since then...I would get out of bed and try to peel the potatoes or*

*something and nothing would work. All of a sudden I was an old lady.* ‘Oldness’ seems to be announced in the event of that which markedly disrupts ordinariness. Talk of being old did not appear in stories about taking account of things or of giving up some things along the way. Oldness appeared in the event of ordinariness being torn apart, shattered. To illustrate further, in our first conversation Frank mentioned he didn’t have time to get old. During the morning tea for participants 18 months later, when aged 99, he said he had been ‘just going along’ and *suddenly the hammer dropped*. Oldness comes in the ordinary being smashed apart. Oldness is existential and nothing to do with chronological age.

The eventful extraordinariness of feeling or becoming ‘old’ is congruent with a number of studies. Although the language used varies, the interpretations are similar (Clarke & Warren, 2006; Cremin, 1992; Kaufman, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2000; Thompson, 1993). Nilsson notes how the participants who ‘were old’ “were able to give the time when this experience started and attributed it to specific circumstances when they also had experienced a physical change” (p. 43). And some of Clarke and Warren’s participants pinpointed the time they began to feel old. One is quoted as saying “I just feel decrepit all of a sudden” (Clarke & Warren, p. 64). An always-already-there ‘oldness’ is announced in the irruptiveness.

## **The New Understandings Illuminated**

It is with some hesitancy that I pause to highlight the new understandings I believe this study offers. There will be literature I did not unearth in my search and perhaps interpretations I made of other’s work which were not what the author intended.

Primordially, I see this study’s philosophical grounding in Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology as bringing a distinctive ontological view of ‘being aged.’ A focus on the ‘being’ of being aged was interpreted as an exploration of the everyday ‘as lived’ in advanced age. This nurtured my emphasis on garnering elders’ stories about particular events rather than how things generally are or how things are thought about. Seemingly, this study brings forward a different interpretation of phenomenology than that which is described in the available

academic literature. Overwhelmingly, extracts from participant stories reported in the literature indicate a reliance on generalised experiences and reflections.

Eliciting stories of particular events and particular days seemed to clear the way for interpreting the phenomenon of being aged in new ways. It was in this text that I ‘heard’ the moments of ‘uncomfortableness’ amid the very familiar. It was this text which led to my interpretation of being aged as being announced in the ‘not-at-homeness.’ It was in this text a rhythm of being in the everyday was disclosed to me. And in the stepping back to think about the meaning of being aged, it was in this text that the ordinariness of being aged in the everyday was brought into the light. Interestingly, how the participants in this study ‘thought about aging’ is remarkably similar to the ‘reflective’ stories gathered in other studies.

Lastly, this study seems to stand out in the hermeneutic phenomenological literature for its inclusion of the indigenous voice. Bringing forward the stories of elder Maori enriched the text as a whole and brought particular experiences of being aged into the light.

## **Limitations of the Study**

“The world’s darkening never reaches  
to the light of Being” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 4).

The boundaries hinted at by the philosophies underpinning this study already limited what I did and did not do or see. Beyond this, there are things which remain in the dark, limiting in unknown ways what I came to understand. There are directions I did not turn in, many elders I did not speak with, many conversations which did not open up, many questions I did not ask and many things I did not think to think about.

I cannot know what influence my method of recruitment had on the findings. Beyond their basic demographic characteristics, I had no knowledge about the potential participants. More than half of those who ‘received’ an invitation to participate in the study declined. Those who consented were the willing volunteers. Thus the findings are limited to what these elders brought into

conversation. How the stories of ‘the unwilling’ might have been the same or different remains unknown.

All of the participants resided within the North Shore Electorate and I made every effort to recruit across diverse communities within it. However, the region as a whole has higher than national average rates of post-secondary education, employment and income (Statistics New Zealand, 2003). I cannot know whether this particular context contributed in any way to the elders’ experiences of being aged. Limiting this study to just the one region may have acted to conceal a social contextual influence.

The voice of only four Maori elders may have limited some of the meanings uncovered pertaining to what it is to be aged and be Maori. And other voices of those who are aged were not heard at all, such as those of Pacific Island and Asian peoples and those of recent migrants. Their voices were not excluded but may have missed inclusion due to not being registered on the general electoral roll or by their declining participation. Still, the presence of different voices may have unveiled a greater diversity of meanings.

My presence brought its own limits. Who I am; my background, my experiences, my interests and my presuppositions all acted to limit the study in some way. Furthermore, not all parts of the conversations with participants were included. In this regard, of the several hundred anecdotes I interpreted along the way, only those selected for their ‘illustrative’ meanings are heard in this thesis. All these things shaped what I heard and thought about. Heidegger (1971/2001) proposes that “we never come to thoughts. They come to us” (p. 6). In this way, this study is limited as some thoughts just did not come to me. And when the thoughts did come I often found myself running up against the invisible boundaries created by language itself. Many-a-time I struggled to write in words what I was thinking; many-a-time I struggled to say what I wanted to say. Even now, if I went back to re-write, these limits would shift and I would find other words; other ways of saying things.

Perhaps most poignantly, through the philosophical lens of interpretive phenomenology, the nature of the participants’ and my own ‘being-in-the-world’

imposed dynamic limits. “The world is a constant passage back and forth, between shadow and light” (Harman, 2007, p. 2). Just as I thought I ‘had’ grasped the appearance or the meaning of something it seemed to slip away. Perhaps this ‘slippage’ also occurred for the participants as we conversed. Thus, my emergent capacity for interpreting and holding this movement in my thoughts may mean the ambiguity and the mysteriousness of the meaning of being aged fails to show through in this thesis.

## **Strengths of the Study**

“All creation, because it is such a drawing-up, is a drawing, as of water from a spring” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 73).

Strengths are drawn into this study in several ways. At its very foundation is the presence of the philosophies which inform it. At all turns, from designing the whole of the study to finding my way through each part of it, I aimed for congruence with Heideggerian phenomenology and Gadamerian hermeneutics. At times this came through a conscientious effort. At other times the guidance seemed to naturally flow through into the work. As there was no prescriptive process to follow, I have attempted to disclose how I was interpreting the philosophies and bringing them into play.

Including both Maori and non-Maori elders, I believe, brings a further strength to this work. The open inclusion of indigenous and non-indigenous elders creates a point of difference with other interpretive studies. Of the research on aging I uncovered through the literature search, a number of studies were undertaken in countries with a history of colonisation; namely the United States and Canada. In the articles the indigenous peoples of the land are invisible. If any ‘first nations’ voices were present they were not made evident.

However, the mere inclusion of Maori participants in this study would in itself have been a weakness; a weakness of cultural integrity. It became a strength through the partnership with Maori and working closely with the Kaumatua. In particular, the strength springs from the initial indication of this study as being important for Maori and the guidance in the gathering and interpreting of the

anecdotes. I offer Pani's words as an illustration of his acceptance of me and the study's purpose. He said:

*This is a gift to us having you here. This is the longest moment that we have had somebody within our company who has spoken to us so openly, and your asking questions openly. And hopefully the questions that you ask us we answer you for your benefit. I hope that I can express to you the way I know it has been happening. But as you might find when you are here with my brief comments, you work on it and start to think about it, and you can come back and I can tell it to you again. It is so interesting. You get interested in something and you are involved with it and you forget about the time.*

The relating was a 'spring' of strength for this study as a whole. For me, being in the study was an honour and a joy. I felt a genuine receptivity to the people I came to meet. In return, I experienced warmth and openness from the participants which I believe fed through into the depth of conversation. I offer two illustrations. Curly sent a card in which the verse read 'I hope this Christmas makes you feel very special and very loved, for after all...you are;' after which he wrote *special*. And *if you require further assistance I am available*. Several months after my conversations with Merrill she wrote a long letter to tell me about all the things that had *changed* since my last visit. She said *I won a trophy for poetry. 13" tall, rock crystal with a rock crystal ball on top and a marble black and white base. It weighs a ton! ...So some positive things are still happening at 89 and life is going on.*

Furthermore, strengths are drawn up from the nature and depth of the anecdotal text. Amid the conversations, stories of particular events were garnered, bringing an 'as lived' characteristic to much of the text. Eight second interviews were conducted. And the conversations remained open until each person's collection of anecdotes was finalised. Thus the number of participants recruited was determined by the initial interpretation of the text and not pre-set. In this way,

the recruiting and the conversations continued until there was a familiarity of the meanings showing. The time to stop was left to show itself.

## **Considering the Implications for Practice**

Practitioners who work with and for community-dwelling elders are implicated by this study's findings. Being implicated means being enfolded, entangled, entwined or involved in some way. And being implicated means being brought into connection with something (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982). Thus, by bringing forward my thoughts on the implications for practice, I am 'involving' practitioners in the meanings uncovered. My thinking hinges on the understanding that:

we cannot receive the hints that emanate from the hidden region of being unless we are already listening in that direction. This is done neither by science nor by logic, which reduce being to the way it is represented by humans, deaf to any mystery....since what is mysterious can never be reduced to concepts. (Harman, 2007, pp. 148-149)

This study's findings illuminate the 'being' of being aged in its complexity, in spite of its everyday ordinariness. They show that theoretical knowing is not enough to 'hear' what it is to be in the everyday in advanced age. And they show that theoretical knowing is not enough to hear the meaning of being aged. Thus, ontologically, being aged holds a mystery of its own and will always, in some way, be veiled in darkness. To 'hear' beyond the hearsay and common assumptions about aging and the aged calls for 'listening in that direction.' Drawing this notion into the world of practice with elder clients, it implies practitioners who listen beyond the self-evident and the taken-for-granted will have richer understandings to call on when making practice decisions. It implies that being with elders in practice will be enriched by 'listening in the direction of what is hidden.' Fiumara (1990) refers to "the listening attitude" (p. 145). It is a 'way of listening' that influences not only what the practitioner hears but also what the client is drawn to say. Listening is a mode of 'inviting.' It invites talking openly and reflecting deeply. Listening is also a mode of 'showing.' It shows that feelings are heard, understood and affirmed. Hence, listening is a way

of informing practice through ‘receiving the hints that emanate from the hidden region of being.’

I am not suggesting that practitioners do not already listen to their elder clients. In practice they will already ask questions and hear answers. But amid the ‘doing’ of practice the listening may turn toward what is anticipated and away from ‘listening’ toward what is concealed. In practice, what is offered as listening and what elders experience as ‘being heard’ may be different things. Merrill’s story of her encounter revealed the practitioner as engaging in speaking rather than ‘listening.’ The questions which ‘need’ to be asked in the moment will come in the midst of listening. As such, ‘practice as listening’ is not a turning away from the doing of practice but a turning towards it. Practice as listening invites conversation in the direction of what is ordinarily covered over. Thus, listening also involves silence which opens up the space for that which may be said.

Practice as listening would be listening for the ordinariness of ‘this’ elder’s experience of being aged and of how things ordinarily are in ‘this’ elder’s everyday. And it would be listening for ‘this’ elder’s experience of any ‘new’ out of the ordinary, eventful moments. Perhaps practice as listening would be about enabling ‘this’ elder to create or re-create an ordinariness of being aged and an ordinariness of being in the everyday. It is the ordinariness of living in advanced age that holds things in place. The ordinariness holds things together. What is called for in practice will show itself through listening.

“What is spoken is never, and in no language, what is said” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 11).

Practice calls for speaking. Yet ‘what is said’ always goes beyond the words themselves. Language carries its own message. Language points to what is ‘said’ beyond what is spoken. My interpretation of the literature suggests there is an ‘ordinary language’ of practice which holds unspoken meanings within it. Most pressingly, the taken-for-granted language of ‘old’ and ‘oldness’ so readily spoken by practitioners conceals hidden meanings and covers over the complexities of being aged. Thus practice as listening would also be a listening to what is ordinarily spoken in conversation with and about elders. It would be ‘listening’ for what the spoken words ‘say’ and thinking about their hidden

meanings. The questioning and the interpretive dialogue will come with ‘listening’ to the ordinary language of practice. Thus, the findings imply that listening in the direction of what is hidden holds the potential for revealing new ways of thinking about and engaging in conversation with elders in the world of practice.

## **Considering the Implications for Education**

In my role as an educator I am primarily responsible for teaching research methods and ethical reasoning to undergraduate occupational therapy students. Therefore, in laying out the implications for education, I am not only ‘involving’ health educators in general but involving myself. Already I bring my deepened understandings of hermeneutics and phenomenology into the classroom. I can ‘show’ rather than ‘teach.’ I can offer stories of real research experiences. For example, I can show the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of eliciting everyday stories which tell of events as they are lived compared with those which hold generalised understandings. And I notice how students listen in a different way when concepts described in the book are brought to life. It shows me the importance of bringing research stories into the classroom and not merely offering explanations of the theory and methods. It shows the importance of always striving to make education ‘real.’

Compellingly, this study points to the importance of preparing students in the health field to ‘hear’ how taken-for-granted understandings about aging and the aged means missing the complexities of what lies below the surface. Experiential learning which enables presuppositions to come to light may be a beginning point. The learning might then move to ways of interpreting texts related to aging and being aged which go beyond the self-evident. For example, showing students photographic images ‘depicting advanced age’ would open the space for guiding an exploration of what the images ‘say.’ It would enable guiding an exploration of how the students come to know what they think they already ‘know.’ Bringing elders’ voices into the learning experience would then enable a revealing of the mysteriousness of being aged. Learning to hear what lies within

elders' talk of their everyday, or within their stories about encounters with health practitioners, may be a way of preparing students for 'practice as listening.'

Furthermore, Christina's story of how *people may sometimes, out of kindness and thoughtfulness...make her feel old* points to the need for students to be attuned to how elders are feeling and to 'hear' how their own actions and words are experienced by their clients. Hence, educators are involved through the importance of students learning ways of 'being' a practitioner rather than simply 'doing' practice with elders. Again, making education 'real' through bringing images and elders' voices into the classroom may evoke a deep learning which is carried into practice.

Yet I am aware this study was not about practice or about educating students for practice with elders. This study was about the meaning of being aged in the everyday. Therefore, the findings also 'involve' the general public. They point to an educational opportunity for those who are on their way to being aged, and those who are already aged, to learn from the understandings gained. In addition, they point to opportunities for others who are in everyday contact with those who are aged, such as family, to learn something of the complexity of the meaning of being aged and to consider new ways of being with the elder person. Perhaps it is within this untapped field of public education that the implications from this study find their real place.

### **Considering the Implications for Further Research**

This study asked an ontological question. Hence, what I 'listened' for and what I 'heard' are different than if I took another approach, informed by a different philosophy. As with most research projects, the findings perhaps raise more questions than they answer. But that is the nature of growing an understanding of things. These findings contribute but one small piece toward a large and never finished puzzle. They point to questions which are not yet asked.

"What is the meaning of being old?" This study's participants alluded to oldness as being something particular. And while an ontological question would aim to uncover elders' experiences of 'being old,' other pathways of inquiry would render different understandings. "Does being meaningfully occupied in the

everyday influence the experience of ‘being old,’ or vice versa?” The findings allude to oldness being experienced when one is no longer able to do what one wants to do. Florence said *I sometimes say I have lived too long because I get bored, bored to tears.* Her words point to a place for gaining a richer understanding of the interplay between being occupied in the everyday and the experience of agedness or oldness. Although in pointing to these possible research directions I am aware that ‘being old’ would also be clouded in mystery and thus never fully knowable.

“How do elders living in rural areas experience aging in the everyday?” Only urban-dwelling elders participated in this study. Research which included elders living in more remote situations may further illuminate the meaning of being aged. “How do others experience elders’ aging?” This study did not involve others such as family or other members of the household. Questions open up around how others’ experiences may be similar or different. Others’ stories would enrich the understandings of being in the everyday in advanced age. They may enable a greater clarity or highlight the mysteriousness of the phenomenon of being aged itself.

Research questions relating to practice with elders are also enfolded within the findings. “How do practitioners experience being with elders in practice?” New Zealand’s aging population implies that many more practitioners across the health and social fields will be working with elders in the foreseeable future. So the question of how working with elder clients ‘is’ for practitioners gains importance. “What does ‘listening’ look like in practice with elders?” And “how do practitioners experience ‘listening’ when working with elders?” The findings point to there being a place for practitioners to be with elders in the mode of ‘listening in the direction of what is hidden.’ Yet what it would be like in practice is unknown. “What happens when such listening occurs?” The influence different modes of listening may have on the outcomes of practice is unknown. And “what is the experience of elders who feel listened to?” If others’ actions can influence elders’ everyday experience of being ‘old’ rather than aged, then these and other research questions lie waiting.

## **At the End of the Day**

From all that has gone before, I now stand looking backward and forward again, from one farthest horizon to the other, in order to bring what matters into sharp relief. The journey began with asking “how do elders experience aging in their everyday lives?” Enfolded within the question is the assumption that the phenomenon of being aged exists but is ordinarily hidden from view. I set out not knowing where the research pathway would lead. Yet I did not journey entirely alone, with nothing to illuminate the path ahead. The philosophical foundations of interpretive phenomenology guided my way. And the ‘deep soil’ on which the whole of this study stands is the anecdotal text gathered through my conversations with the fifteen community-dwelling elders. Interpreting what their spoken words were ‘saying’ was in the mode of a hermeneutical engagement with the text. And the thinking about the meaning of being aged was by way of a phenomenological reflection on the whole. Yet, at the end of the day, this study simply illuminates what was always already there. It shines a light upon the ontology of being aged; something which is usually concealed in the darkness of the taken-for-granted. What shows is that being aged is, at the same time, a remarkably simple and an extraordinarily complex phenomenon.

## **What Stands Out as Mattering?**

Ordinariness matters. Being aged is the natural order of being in the world. Aging just happens. Ordinarily it is ‘let be’ to do its own thing. Having things seem ‘as they usually are’ is about carrying on. The feeling of ordinariness is in getting on with, and being absorbed in, doing the things which are there to be done. Thus, holding a sense of ‘getting on with life’ matters. It keeps things in their place and holds things together. Yet changes do happen. In this way, taking account of those things that can be taken account of restores an everyday ordinariness. Hence, for the most part, the ‘being’ of being aged is hidden amidst the carrying on with things. Being aged primordially exists in the shadows of ‘going-along’ with how things are and with what is yet to come.

Purposefulness matters. Having a purpose is a reason for being; it gives meaning. It is about being hopeful toward the future. It is about feeling a sense of

contributing to something beyond the self; of giving for a common purpose. It is about making a difference in ‘the world’ in some way, no matter how seemingly trivial. Purposefulness shows in doing things for the sake of others, in passing something on and in the readiness for leaving something behind. Being closer to the end of one’s life may bring feelings of purposefulness into the light.

Memories matter. Remembering the people, the places, the things done and the times gone by matters. In being aged, so much of one’s life is in the past. Yet it is important that what belongs to the past is not ‘gone’ from the present. Memories offer a ‘nearness’ even when alone. They hold ‘near’ those who are missing from the everyday. And they hold ‘near’ the feeling of knowing who one is from the wholeness of what has gone before. Memories matter because they carry feelings of relatedness to others and connectedness in time.

The dwelling-place matters. The spaces and places in which everyday life is encountered matter. It is about circumstantiality; about being in spatial circumstances in which belonging is announced and which ‘call’ forth engaging in what is present. It is about being in everyday places which invoke being involved. And here, familiar spaces are more disclosing than those which are unfamiliar. Dwelling in familiar spaces and places means recognising what is always already there to be done. What matters is the feeling of ‘wanting-to-do’ things; the feeling of being drawn into the day.

Announcements of being aged just happen. The announcing appears unexpectedly. It comes from deep within and happens in the midst of going about the everyday. Something not noticed before, yet always already there, shows itself suddenly. Yet, how the phenomenon of being aged will appear is in itself a mystery. It may appear as a gradualness of *just fading away* or it may appear as an abruptness of the *hammer coming down*. Being aged is being in the ‘thrownness’ of life in advanced age. Thrownness unveils the extraordinariness of being aged.

Thus, being in the ordinary everyday both conceals and reveals the phenomenon of being aged.

Being aged is how it is.

# Appendices

## Appendix I: Glossary of Maori Terms<sup>25</sup>

*Aroha*: Love, pity, affection or concern for

*Kai*: Food

*Karakia*: Prayer or incantation

*Kaumatua*: Male elder

*Kaupapa*: Plan, principle or philosophy

*Koha*: Gift or donation

*Kuia*: Female elder

*Mana*: Authority, power or prestige

*Marae*: Community meeting place where formal greetings and discussions take place in front of the wharenu i or meeting house

*Mihi whakatau*: Formal speech of welcome or an official welcoming

*Mokopuna*: Grandchild or grandchildren

*Motuhake*: Discrete, separate or independent

*Pa*: Traditional fortified village

*Pakeha*: People with fair skin or of European descent

*Poi*: a posture dance done with flax balls on a string

*Powhiri*: Formal welcome

*Taonga*: Treasure or gift

*Te Tiriti o Waitangi*: The Treaty of Waitangi

*Tukutuku*: decorative wall panels in a meeting house

*Turangawaewae*: Standing in the tribe or domicile

*Wananga*: Knowledge, learning or a place of learning

*Whanau*: Family or extended family

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<sup>25</sup> Full references for each term are given in the text

**Appendix II: Northern X Regional Ethics 26 August 2005**



**Appendix III: Northern X Regional Ethics 7 March 2006**

## **Appendix IV: Locality Assessment – Te Puna Hauora**

**Full Project Title : Elders' experiences of aging in the context of their everyday, community lives**

**Short Project Title : Elders' everyday community lives**

**Brief outline of study:**

A study of how aging is experienced by elders in the context of everyday community living. Up to 25 non-Maori aged 80+/Maori aged 70+ living at home will be purposively selected & invited to participate in in-depth individual, semi-structured interviews focused on the subjective experience of aging as the elders go about their job of everyday living. People's experiences & meanings of being older, aging and the structure & essence of what they do everyday will be explored. Location of the study is urban North Shore City, with diverse demographic communities. Electoral roll data will inform selection of potential participants, with selection across gender, age, ethnicity and living circumstances (with other(s) or living alone). The findings will guide development of a future, longitudinal study of aging in place.

**Principal Investigator:**

Valerie Wright-St Clair, PhD Student  
 Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care  
 School of Population Health, University of Auckland

**Contact details:**

PO Box 35 685  
 Browns Bay  
 Auckland

**Locality Organisation signoff**

Ethics committees review whether investigators have ensured their studies would meet established ethical standards, if conducted at appropriate localities; each locality organisation is asked to use the locality assessment form to check that the investigator has also made the appropriate local study arrangements.

**Ethics approval for study conduct at each site is conditional on favourable locality assessment at that locality.**

**Identify any local issues and specify how they will be addressed.**

**Suitability of local researcher**

Are all roles for the investigator(s) at the local site appropriate (e.g. has any conflict the investigator might have between her or his local roles in research and in patient care been adequately resolved)?

The researcher is independent to Te Puna Hauora and has no involvement in the health or community services provided by the service. As such no conflict is identified.

**Suitability of the local research environment**

Have the resources (other than funding which is conditional on ethical approval) and/or facilities that the study requires locally been identified? Are they appropriate and available?

Te Puna Hauora has had input to developing the research methods and made recommendations for making the study appropriate for elder Maori to participate.

The researcher can liaise with Te Puna Hauora for assistance with the interview, or for use of a room at the request of any participant. No charge will be made for room utilization.

If approved by the ethics committee, the kaumātua can give potential participants a copy of the letter of information and consent form and answer routine questions about the study.

Advice will be given on interpretation of research findings where relevant.

Any payment for staff time will be negotiated as appropriate and at a rate of \$30 per hour.

### **What are the specific issues relating to the local community?**

Are there any cultural or other issues *specific* to this locality, or to participants for whom study recruitment or participation is primarily at this locality? If so, how have they been addressed?

Clients of Te Puna Hauora are primarily Maori and the researcher is pakeha. The potential issues related to cultural safety and te reo have been discussed and addressed in the study's design. Te Puna Hauora is involved as a support partner of the research, and as such will work with the researcher to ensure procedures are conducted sensitively and findings are interpreted appropriately.

### **Information sheet/consent form contact details:**

Contact details for Health & Disability Consumer Advocates:

North Shore Office

Ph: 09 441 9001

I understand that I may withdraw locality approval if any significant local concerns arise. I agree to advise the Principal Investigator and then the relevant ethics committee should this occur.

**Signature:**

**Date:** 26/7/05

**Name:** John Marsden QSO

**Position:** Chief Executive Officer, Te Puna Hauora O Te Raki Paewhenua

**Contact details:**

58 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Ph: 489 3049

## **Appendix V: Locality Assessment – Age Concern North Shore**

**Full Project Title: Elders' experiences of aging in the context of their everyday, community lives**

**Short Project Title: Elders' everyday community lives**

**Brief outline of study:**

A study of how aging is experienced by elders in the context of everyday community living. Up to 25 non-Maori aged 80+/Maori aged 70+ living at home will be purposively selected & invited to participate in in-depth individual, semi-structured interviews focused on the subjective experience of aging as the elders go about their job of everyday living. People's experiences & meanings of being older, aging and the structure & essence of what they do everyday will be explored. Location of the study is urban North Shore City, with diverse demographic communities. Electoral roll data will inform selection of potential participants, with selection across gender, age, ethnicity and living circumstances (with other(s) or living alone). The findings will guide development of a future, longitudinal study of aging in place.

**Principal Investigator:**

Valerie Wright-St Clair, PhD Student  
 Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care  
 School of Population Health, University of Auckland

**Contact details:**

PO Box 35 685  
 Browns Bay  
 Auckland

**Locality Organisation signoff**

Ethics committees review whether investigators have ensured their studies would meet established ethical standards, if conducted at appropriate localities;

each locality organisation is asked to use the locality assessment form to check that the investigator has also made the appropriate local study arrangements.

**Ethics approval for study conduct at each site is conditional on favourable locality assessment at that locality.**

**Locality issues: Identify any local issues and specify how they will be addressed.**

**Suitability of local researcher**

Are all roles for the investigator(s) at the local site appropriate (e.g. has any conflict the investigator might have between her or his local roles in research and in patient care been adequately resolved)?

The role of the investigator is appropriate in relation to Age Concern North Shore clients and customers. No conflict of roles exists.

**Suitability of the local research environment**

Have the resources (other than funding which is conditional on ethical approval) and/or facilities that the study requires locally been identified? Are they appropriate and available? All agreed resources are appropriate and available:

The Age Concern North Shore library, including previous research reports, is onsite at the Shakespeare Rd office and freely available for access by the researcher.

Information about the study can be printed at no cost in the monthly newsletter to customers.

If approved by ethics committee, field officers can, in the course of their usual roles, be available to give customers a copy of the letter of information and consent form and answer basic questions about the study.

Interview room at the Mary Thomas Centre, Takapuna is available at no cost for infrequent use, or on a donation basis if multiple interviews were to be conducted in the facility.

**What are the specific issues relating to the local community?**

Are there any cultural or other issues *specific* to this locality, or to participants for whom study recruitment or participation is primarily at this locality? If so, how have they been addressed?

This locality provides a community based, voluntary service. The customers of Age Concern North Shore are primarily visited or contacted in their own homes. While the North Shore has diverse communities within it, no specific cultural issues are identified with this study.

**Information sheet/consent form contact details:**

Contact details for Health & Disability Consumer Advocates:  
North Shore Office

I understand that I may withdraw locality approval if any significant local concerns arise. I agree to advise the Principal Investigator and then the relevant ethics committee should this occur.

**Signature:** **Date:** 20/7/05

**Name:** Janferié Bryce-Chapman      **Position:** Executive Officer, Age Concern North Shore Inc.

**Contact details:** 177b Shakespeare Rd, Milford,  
North Shore

## Appendix VI: Information Sheet

### General Practice & Primary Health Care



School of Population Health  
 Private Bag 92019  
 Auckland  
 New Zealand,  
 Tamaki Campus  
 361 Morrin Road  
 Glen Innes  
[www.health.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.health.auckland.ac.nz)  
 Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 extn 82865  
 Facsimile: 64 9 373 7624  
 Email: [v.wright-stclair@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:v.wright-stclair@auckland.ac.nz)

### Title of the Study: Elders' everyday community lives

#### Principal Investigator: Valerie Wright-St Clair

PhD student, University of Auckland  
 PO Box 35-685  
 Browns Bay  
 Auckland  
 Phone: xxx xxxx

#### Contact persons:

Valerie Wright-St Clair  
 Phone: xxx xxxx  
 Student supervisor: Dr Ngaire Kerse, Dept of General Practice & Primary Health Care, University of Auckland  
 Phone: 373 7599 extension 84467

#### Introduction:

You are invited to take part in a study about how aging is experienced by elders living at home as they go about their everyday lives. The New Zealand Government has a policy called “aging in place” which aims to support elders to live at home for as long as they wish, and are able to.

## Aims of the study

This study aims to understand aging as it is experienced by some of the eldest men and women living in the community.

## Who will be included?

Up to 25 men and women, aged 80 years and older, living at home in urban North Shore, Auckland, will be selected to participate in the study. Maori men and women aged 70 and older are included because of the disparity in life span for Maori. Understanding diverse experiences of aging is important, so this study wants to include people who are just 80 (or 70 for Maori), people who are older, people who have different ethnic identities (particularly Maori and pakeha New Zealander), and people who live with a partner, another person, or who live alone. Participants will need to be able to recall recent events and talk about their experiences.

## How were you included in the invitation?

The New Zealand Electoral Office holds information on all people who are registered on the electoral roll. Your name was identified as meeting the age of eligibility for the study and living on the North Shore, Auckland.

## What will happen during the study?

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be contacted by the researcher to set up a convenient day and time to be interviewed. The interview will not be a list of questions to answer. It will be more like a conversation about how you experience being older and doing the things you do day-to-day. It will be about the stories you have to tell about your everyday life. Because this sort of interview takes time, up to 3 visits of about 1 hour each might be needed. This means that if you get tired, or the researcher needs to clarify the things talked about, a new time can be made for another visit. The total interview time will be about 3 hours. You can choose to have a family member, whanau or friend present.

If you are Maori and would prefer to speak te reo Maori in the interview, or would feel more comfortable to have a Maori person present, a research partner will be nominated by the kaumatua at Te Puna Hauora O Te Raki Paewhenua. The interview would be transcribed into English for analysis purposes.

Accuracy of what is discussed is important. If you consent, an audio-tape will be made of the interview. However, you can at any time ask for the tape to be turned off, or to stop the interview without giving a reason. Following the interview, a type-written copy of the interview will be made. The researcher will use this copy to study the uniqueness of each story and to look for patterns or things that may be common across the different interviews. The researcher will ask if you wish to receive a copy of your audio-tape or type-written interview.

### **Where will the interviews be held?**

You can choose to be interviewed at home or at another location that you feel comfortable with. This could be the home of a friend or family member. A comfortable room for the interview is available at Age Concern North Shore in Takapuna or Te Puna Hauora in Northcote. If you need to travel for the interview, you will be provided with a petrol voucher or the researcher will arrange travel by taxi.

### **What will happen after the interview?**

The researcher will write a summary of main things talked about and give this to you to read. The researcher will contact you to discuss the summary and work with you to make any changes.

Approximately six months after the interview, you will be invited to meet with a small group of other participants, over a morning or afternoon tea, to discuss the researcher's analysis of the experience of aging in everyday life. Your opinions on the accuracy of the results will be important.

### **When will the study take place?**

The research will be conducted through late 2005 and 2006.

**What are the benefits of the study?**

In other studies where people are interviewed about their experiences, participants have reported that they gain new and beneficial understandings about themselves and their lives.

Age Concern North Shore and Te Puna Hauora will receive a copy of the research findings which may inform the services they provide for elders on the North Shore. The findings will also be submitted to the Ministry of Social Policy and the New Zealand Institute for Researching on Aging so the information is available to inform policy and other research.

**What are the risks or inconveniences?**

There are no identified risks of participating in the study. You do not have to answer any of the questions, and you may stop the interview at any time.

You might experience some inconvenience because of the time commitment, or by having the interview in your home or at another venue. The total time commitment over a year is about 6 hours. If you find things inconvenient at any stage you can change the times or you can withdraw without giving a reason.

**Is the study therapeutic or non-therapeutic?**

As no health or social services are being tested in this study, you would continue with any usual health treatments, appointments or social services. However if anything was discussed during the study that might suggest a health or social concern, the researcher would ask your consent to advise your GP or primary health practitioner.

**Is there any cost involved?**

There will be no cost to you. Any cost of travel will be paid for by the researcher. The researcher will provide refreshments at each visit in recognition of your time given for the study.

## **Participation**

Your participation is entirely voluntary (your choice). You do not have to take part in this study. If you choose not to take part, this will not affect any future health care or social services.

If you have not sent the consent form back to the researcher after one month, you may receive a visit or phone call from the Age Concern North Shore field officer or the Te Puna Hauora kaumātua to check whether you have any questions. The field officer or kaumātua will not put pressure on you to participate.

If you do agree to take part you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason and this will in no way affect your future health care or social services.

## **Where can I get more information about the study?**

You can contact the researcher any time by telephoning xxx xxxx, or writing to Valerie Wright-St Clair, PO Box 35-685 Browns Bay, Auckland.

## **If I need an interpreter, can one be provided?**

Yes. Identify the preferred language for an interpreter on the attached consent form. You may have a friend or family member/whanau support to understand the risks and/or benefits of this study and any other explanation you may require.

## **What if I have any concerns?**

If you have any queries or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study you can contact a Health and Disability Advocate, telephone 0800 555 050.

## **Confidentiality**

No material which could personally identify you will be used in any reports on this study. A pseudonym (fictitious name) will be used on the interview

transcripts and when quoting any information from the interview in research reports or articles. You will be invited to choose your own pseudonym.

During the study, only the researcher (and Maori research partner where relevant) and her supervisors will have access to the information. The original audio-tapes and interview transcripts will be stored for 6 years in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care. At the end of this time, the audio-tapes will be destroyed and the transcripts shredded.

## **Results**

The results of the study will be discussed with you at the group meeting after all interviews are completed and analysed. You will also be sent a written summary of the results. The researcher is happy to discuss the results with you at any time.

## **Compensation**

In the unlikely event of a physical injury as a result of your participation in this study, you may be covered by ACC under the Injury Prevention, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. ACC cover is not automatic and your case will need to be assessed by ACC according to the provisions of the 2002 Injury Prevention Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. If your claim is accepted by ACC, you still might not get any compensation. This depends on a number of factors such as whether you are an earner or non-earner. ACC usually provides only partial reimbursement of costs and expenses and there may be no lump sum compensation payable. There is no cover for mental injury unless it is a result of physical injury. If you have ACC cover, generally this will affect your right to sue the investigators.

If you have any questions about ACC, contact your nearest ACC office or the investigator.

**Statement of Approval**

This study has received ethical approval from the Northern Regional Ethics Committee.”

**Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any  
questions about this study.**

## Appendix VII: Consent form

### General Practice & Primary Health Care



School of Population Health  
 Private Bag 92019  
 Auckland  
 New Zealand,  
 Tamaki Campus  
 361 Morrin Road  
 Glen Innes  
[www.health.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.health.auckland.ac.nz)  
 Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 extn 82865  
 Facsimile: 64 9 373 7624  
 Email: [v.wright-stclair@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:v.wright-stclair@auckland.ac.nz)

### Title of the Study: **Elders' everyday community lives**

I have read and I understand the information sheet dated 18 July 2005 for volunteers taking part in the study designed to describe how aging is experienced by elders within their everyday community living.

I have had the opportunity to discuss this study and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.

I have had the opportunity to use whanau support or a friend to help me ask questions and understand the study.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and this will in no way affect my future health care or social services.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material which could identify me will be used in any reports on this study.

I have had time to consider whether to take part.

I know who to contact if I have any concerns or questions about the study.

I wish to have a family member or friend present during the interview. YES/NO

I wish to use te reo Maori (Maori language) during the interviews. YES/NO

I am comfortable with being interviewed in my own home. YES/NO

- I consent to my interviews being audio-taped. YES/NO
- I wish to receive a cassette copy of my interview. YES/NO
- I wish to receive a typewritten copy of my interview. YES/NO
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings. YES/NO
- I agree to my GP or other current provider being informed if any information arises during the interviews or study about a health or social concern. YES/NO

#### **REQUEST FOR INTERPRETER**

English	I wish to have an interpreter.	Yes	No
Maori	E hiahia ana ahau ki tetahi kaiwhakamaori/kaiwhaka pakeha korero.	Ae	Kao
Cook Island	Ka inangaro au i tetai tangata uri reo.	Ae	Kare
Fijian	Au gadreva me dua e vakadewa vosa vei au	Io	Sega
Niuean	Fia manako au ke fakaaoga e taha tagata fakahokohoko kupu.	E	Nakai
Samoan	Ou te mana'o ia i ai se fa'amatala upu.	Ioe	Leai
Tokelaun	Ko au e fofou ki he tino ke fakaliliu te gagana Peletania ki na gagana o na motu o te Pahefika	Ioe	Leai
Tongan	Oku ou fiema'u ha fakatonulea.	Io	Ikai
	Other languages to be added following consultation with relevant communities.		

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name)

hereby consent to take part in this study.

Contact phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Full names of Researchers:

Valerie Wright-St Clair, PhD student, Principal Investigator

Dr Ngaire Kerse, Co-researcher

Dr Peter Davis, Co-researcher

Contact Phone Number for researchers:

Valerie Wright-St Clair: xxx xxxx

Project explained by: \_\_\_\_\_

Project role: Age Concern Field Officer / Te Puna Hauora kaumatau (delete one)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:**

A copy of the consent form will be returned to you for your records.

Owing to the time involved in interviewing all participants and analysing the findings, the summary of the research findings may take up to one year to complete.

## **Appendix VIII: Guiding the Research Conversation**

Perhaps start by telling me a little about your parents & family and this house.

(Maori: Perhaps start by telling me a little about your whanau and how you came to live here).

Tell me about your decision to participate in this study.

Tell me about yesterday. Was yesterday a typical day for you? OR

Tell me about this morning. Was that a typical start to the day?

Tell me about being (\_age\_\_).

How have you got to be (\_age\_\_) and stayed so active/healthy/interested in life?

When are you old? Can you tell me about a moment recently when you thought “oh perhaps I am getting old”?

When are you not old? What about a moment recently when you thought “mm, perhaps I am not so old”?

Can you tell me about a time recently when you looked at someone else and thought “oh that’s an old person”?

Can you tell me about a time recently when someone else acted toward you as if you were old?

What makes a good day? Tell me about a good day you had recently?

What makes a bad/not so good day? Tell me about a bad day you had recently?

What do you hope you never have to stop doing?

What if the day comes when you can’t \_\_\_\_\_?

Inevitably aging brings changes. How does aging show itself everyday for you?

How would you define aging?

What do you notice about time? Can you tell me about a day recently when time seemed to go by quickly?

What about a day when time seemed to go by slowly?

What things from your past do you think help make you who you are today?

(As a Maori, do you still see yourself as having responsibility in the family circle?)

(As a Maori, do you still see yourself as having responsibility in the community?)

When you look towards the future what do you see or hope for?

(Maori: What would like to see for the future generations to come?)

Tell me about what you will do tomorrow.

We have talked about a lot of things. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to aging and your everyday life?

## Appendix IX: Research Outputs from this Thesis

### Publication

Wright-St Clair, V. (2008). Occupational therapy's place and purpose in aging New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 55(1), 13-17.

### Conference Papers

Wright-St Clair, V. (November, 2007). *Veiled in darkness: The everydayness of being aged*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Nursing Research Conference, Showcase, Auckland, New Zealand.

Wright-St Clair, V. (November, 2007). *Ageing positively on its own terms*. Invited speaker for New Zealand Association of Gerontology Conference, Ageing: The everyday experience, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Wright-St Clair, V. (June, 2007). *Veiled in darkness: The everydayness of advanced aging*. Paper presented at the Institute for Interpretive Phenomenology, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA.

Wright-St Clair, V. (November, 2006). *Being aged is not the same as being old*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Association of Gerontology & the New Zealand Institute for Research on Aging Conference, Ageing in New Zealand: Reporting Research Progress, Wellington, New Zealand.

Wright-St Clair, V. (August, 2006). *Aging well in New Zealand: Messages for practice*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Association of Occupational Therapists Conference, Dancing Jandals: Occupational Therapy in the Pacific Rim, Wellington, New Zealand.

Wright-St Clair, V. (July, 2006). *Elder's participation in everyday occupations: Making the difference between being aged and being old*. Paper presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists, OTs in Action: Local and Global, Sydney, Australia.

Wright-St Clair, V. (2005, June). *Researching the relationship between older people's everyday participation and well-being*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing seminar, Emerging Researchers: Research on Ageing and the Well-being of Older People in New Zealand, Victoria University Wellington, New Zealand.

### Presentations

- V. Wright-St Clair, V. (2008, February 14). '*Being aged:*' *Uncovering the meaning through elders' stories*. Presentation to the Department of General Practice & Primary Health Care, University of Auckland, Auckland.
- V. Wright-St Clair, V. (2007, October 16). *The thesis of the thesis*. Presentation to the Heidegger Reading Group, Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences, AUT University, Auckland.

- V. Wright-St Clair, V. (2007, October 11). *Using interpretive phenomenology to explore the hidden phenomenon of being aged*. Presentation to Department of Social & Community Health, School of Population Health, University of Auckland, Auckland.
- V. Wright-St Clair, V. (2007, September 21). *Aging in the everyday: A study to understand being aged through stories of everyday life*. Presentation to study participants, Akoranga Sports Stadium, North Shore City.

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