



INTRODUCTION

Man has existed for perhaps a million to three million years. Until about ten thousand years ago, he led a precarious life in small societies. He lived primarily by fishing and hunting, and died in his twenties. Only about 10 percent of men survived until age forty. Primitive man was obsolete by that age. Tribes needed only a few older men of wisdom and leadership; more would have strained their limited resources.

Late adulthood, as we now know it, is the result of post-industrial advances. This large extension of life has often brought fear and anxiety: fear of impending weakness, vulnerability, and a life without meaning. There are few positive images of the older "hero," a man of dignity and wisdom. The work of this new life phase is different, involving greater responsibility and judgment in developing the culture morally, intellectually, and aesthetically.

Improving life in its last phase has been a recent topic of great interest in magazines and books. Some experts think that adult development and the huge new groups reaching later life will transform human society as we have known it. Fear has turned into curiosity. What does it look like to be an elder in the new millennium? What do men over sixty really think? Renaissance doctors believed it took a lifetime for one's true identity to emerge. The essence of each person was seen as individual as the stars. This sense of the sacredness of each person challenges us to look at our elders with new eyes.

Several years ago I published *Wise Women*, a book of portraits of women sixty-five to one hundred years of age. I have been amazed by the response. People from all over the world write and e-mail me daily to let me know their reactions to the book, and to tell me their own stories. Many asked me when I would be photographing men in the third phase of their life. They wanted to know more.

I decided to travel around the country to cities and towns as diverse as Miami, Las Vegas, Columbus, Ohio, Big Fork, Montana, and Portland, Maine. I photographed and interviewed over one hundred fifty subjects.

It has been fun. I loved working on this book: I was surprised, entertained, challenged, and uplifted. Some men were sexy and clever and playful, others were physically fragile, others luminous with old age. All made me see the complexity of aging in new ways. I trust these visual and verbal portraits communicate their own rich stories.

Life etches itself into our faces. There are fewer secrets as we near the end of our journey. The need for a façade of outer power fades. In the end, we are all left with who we truly are; we realize that there is no way to escape getting older, no way to escape death. As I traveled around the United States to photograph, I heard many stories. I would like to share some of the memorable experiences and anecdotes I've collected while working on this book.

I went to the celebrated cartoonist Al Hirshfeld's house and walked up four flights of stairs to his studio (p. 37). At age ninety-nine he was still sitting at his drawing board working on an assignment for *The New Yorker*. He was as mentally agile as my young assistant. He told me that he was really a portraitist; he loved getting the ultimate gesture of his subjects, something that summed up their quirky, individual natures. Six months later I photographed his friend, the painter Paul Jenkins (p. 36), who had planned to have dinner with Hirshfeld the night after he died. I sat for a long time talking with Paul about how much he missed his dear friend. Paul had lost so many friends and family in his eighty years, just communicating with him made me feel the mysterious nature of profound loss in life.

In Miami, I rented a studio and asked all of my friends and former students to suggest men from their international communities whom I could photograph. I met seventy-two-year-old Alberto Menendez (p. 68). He came with his guitar and a flamingo-patterned shirt and stayed with us all day helping put everyone else at ease. A Haitian guitarist came later in the day and they created songs they could sing together. Tom Gonzalez asked me to photograph him with his eighty-three-year-old father (p. 84), who was struggling with Alzheimer's disease. Thomas Sr. seemed to be in his own universe until his son encircled him with his arms. This was a rare look at father and son and how the role of caretaker shifts over time from one to the other. The same day, a young woman who had e-mailed me a beautiful letter after reading *Wise Women* came to meet me with her grandfather, Simon Rensin (p. 62). He had left Russia during the 1919



Top: Joyce with Mario Andretti in his trophy room in Pennsylvania.

Middle: Joyce with Octave Finley in Montana.

Bottom: Joyce with Doc in Las Vegas.

revolution, walking and hiding for a year and a half until he finally reached Poland. Venezuela became his next home of exile. That morning he had gone to a rabbi to ask about the Spanish prayer for Passover. He also mentioned that he regretted never having had a Bar Mitzvah. The rabbi performed the ceremony, admonishing that it is never too late.

Next, two domino players came to be photographed (p. 41). As they were leaving they told me that they played every day from 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. I learned that dominoes can be a form of meditation as it focuses their minds and they become lost in that universe. Nothing else distracts them for those hours of bliss, away from their day-to-day problems and close to their Cuban heritage.

In Columbus, I spent a glorious day working with students from the Columbus College of Art and Design. The school put together a schedule of amazing men from their community, from a CEO to an eighty-year-old member of the original Tuskegee Airmen. It was a marathon session of interviews and portraits with students acting as my assistants.

Las Vegas was my next stop, a town built on casinos and façades that draws people from diverse backgrounds. Doc, age eighty-three (pp. 12–13), came in his training outfit. He said, that he always trains young boxers to see their potential. He said, "Dreams and inspirations arise of their own accord, like springs and rivers."

We drove to Nazareth, Pennsylvania, to meet racecar legend Mario Andretti (p. 93). He invited my assistants to view his personal sports bar, trophy room, and wine cellar. He chose a special bottle of wine as a gift for each of us.

I made arrangements to meet eighty-six-year-old painter Andrew Wyeth in Maine (p. 123). He pulled up in his boat at the public landing in Port Clyde at 9:00 a.m. I persuaded him to walk up the ramp in front of my backdrop. His white hair glowed like a crown as the early morning light behind him shone through. In Maine I also attended the Union agricultural fair. I met an electrician who had spent the past fifty years volunteering as a magician at hospitals and community events (p. 31). He had his own puppet, and he said making people laugh had given meaning to his life. I also met men who raised champion birds, livestock, and other animals. They posed gracefully with their prizewinners in the bright August light.

Two weeks later I was in rural Montana attending a tractor



Top: Joyce with Robert Indiana in Maine.

Middle: Joyce with Khing Oei and Jeanie MacPherson in New York.

Bottom: Joyce with Patrick Stewart and David Jones in New York.

parade. The bleachers were filled with enthusiastic onlookers. There were displays of antique engines and grain threshers. I talked with a group of men from the local veterans home who explained to me how much farming has changed during their lifetime. I devoted the next day to learning about the Flathead Indians. There are over seven thousand living on their Montana reservation. Octave, a seventy-four-year-old, gave me a dancing lesson and explained the many symbols in his traditional dance regalia.

I tracked down celebrities who I felt would add another dimension to the book. I wanted to photograph older personalities from film, theater, music, business, and politics. Sir Ben Kingsley (pp. 108–109) told me he was feeling freer than he ever had and proudly showed me a henna tattoo, which he said connected him to his Indian roots. Frank McCourt (p. 96) came to a home-cooked Irish dinner with his wife, brother, and sister-in-law. After a glass of wine, I coaxed them to show me more of their pale white skin. We laughed together and I jumped behind the camera lens. We exchanged stories about growing up poor and Irish.

My assistants did Internet research to help me find men like Archbishop Demetrios (p. 47) and men from the Polar Bear Club. I visited Voodoo Priest Clotaire Bazile on Good Friday (p. 107). He told me he couldn't fix a broken heart but could help with infertility and many diseases. His altar, statues, and plates of rocks and eggs filled a whole room.

Lastly, late one night as I was getting ready for bed, one of my subjects knocked on my door with a present for me. It was box of letters his deceased wife had left him. They were all neatly tied up with string like a ritual offering. He said he thought I would be the type to appreciate the letters long after he was gone.

I feel grateful for all this book has given me. I always photograph with the hope that I will be graced with moments of personal discovery. I have tried to translate these experiences into photographs that are collaborations and that show the complexity, depth, and uniqueness of all my amazing subjects.

JOYCE TENNESON
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