From the Editor (HRM)

HEALTH PROMOTION: A SINGLE STEP

The lecture that day was beginning to drag on so I looked down at my belt and stole a glance at my DigiWalker: the screen numbers told me I had accumulated only 6,500 steps and I realized it was already nearly lunchtime. Then an inspiration hit me: I would walk those 20 blocks from the International Longevity Center to Hunter College. That would surely add a couple thousand steps and then... Well, you get the idea.

The DigiWalker is a small high-tech pedometer (sells for only $19.95) which clips on your clothing and keeps a record of the steps taken each day. When I was given a DigiWalker last year I never suspected it would change my life. But it has. It's not as heroic as jogging. But whenever I clip the DigiWalker on each morning, I look for an opportunity to accumulate steps, keeping in mind the goal of reaching 10,000 steps per day (about five miles). Going for a morning walk with my wife makes a big difference (not just in steps), and walking up the stairs also helps. I can tell there's already been improvement in my overall physical condition.

The point of this little example is to remind us that grandiose ideas like "Health Promotion for an Aging Society" begin with small steps (literally). Recent news reports warn of
an alarming rise in obesity, with ominous implications for hypertension, diabetes and much worse. But demographer Kenneth Manton also notes that chronic disability in the older population has been decreasing for the past decade or more. So is the glass half empty or half full?

The answer is both. Whether or not our society can sustain gains in health promotion will depend, in part, on many small acts of personal responsibility involving diet, exercise, and other well-established interventions. But critics will ask: In pushing personal responsibility, are we not dangerously close to blaming the victim? Are individuals always responsible, say, for their obesity, or should they be suing MacDonalads?

Ethical questions about individual and societal responsibility for health raise many debates. But instead of assigning blame, maybe we should focus on opportunities to change behavior, as the DigiWalker has changed mine. The key seems to be giving people more immediate feedback to reinforce the small changes that in the end add up to a big difference. That's a single step we can take without further debate.

Full Disclosure: the International Longevity Center, publisher of this Newsletter, sells the DigiWalker. More details are available at: http://www.ilcusa.org/shop/estore.htm


On health promotion and aging, see "Healthy People 2010" at: http://www.healthypeople.gov/

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DREAMS FOR THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE

Here is the dream of Helen Luke, age 84, recorded in her journal:

"A Burning House"

I dreamed of a house in which I was living, with other people living in other rooms of it. There was a fire in adjacent property and the firemen were at work, but it began to look as though our house was threatened. I was talking to a fireman and
he asked whose house it was. I suddenly realized that it was not a place I had rented temporarily but my own house. I said so clearly, yet at the same time felt a kind of clarity and release, as though if it burned down no one but myself would be the loser, and it didn't matter to me much. There was no sense of danger to anyone's life in the dream, only to possessions.

(Helen Luke, Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On, p. 247.)

Commentary on the Dream (HRM)

A dream image of one's own house can often symbolize the self or the totality of the dreamer's life. In this dream the aged Helen Luke has recognized that the last stage of life entails loss: burning down or destruction of what she had taken her self to be. She "suddenly realized" that this life of hers was not "rented temporarily" but was indeed her actual existence, her "one and only life cycle, one that permitted no substitutions," as Erik Erikson phrased it. Erikson framed the psychological struggle of old age as "ego-integrity versus despair."

But in this dream, faced with loss, Helen Luke's attitude is far from despairing and at first seems perplexing. Rather than integrity or self-affirmation, Luke feels "a kind of clarity and release" when her house is burning down. The feeling of the dream embodies a movement the great medieval mystic Meister Eckhart called "Gelassenheit" or "letting go." In this condition of detachment Luke can look upon her self and say "No one but myself would be the loser, and it didn't matter much."

In different terms than Erikson, Robert Peck (1968) framed the struggle of later life as "ego-preoccupation versus ego-transcendence." In this dream, Helen Luke's sees her own life-- her memories, her past, her very self-- as mere "possessions," which are indeed endangered by the fire. Her life in its ultimate sense is something more, and she has moved from ego-preoccupation to a numinous kind of transcendence, of letting go. In the closing lines of John Masefield's poem "The Passing Strange," he evokes what at the end of life we may all hope to feel, expressed here so powerfully:

Only a beauty, only a power,
Sad in the fruit, bright in the flower,
Endlessly erring for its hour,

But gathering as we stray, a sense
Of life so lovely and intense
It lingers when we wander hence,

That those who follow, feel behind
Their backs, when all before is blind,
Our joy, a rampart to the mind.

Helen Luke: "A Sense of the Sacred"

An inspiring video on the life and work of Helen Luke, "A Sense of the Sacred," is now available from Parabola Books. For details visit:
http://www.parabola.org/videos/luke/sacred.html

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WEB SEMINAR: LEGAL & ETHICAL ISSUES

"Legal and Ethical Issues of Aging" is a new Web Seminar produced by the American Society on Aging. The Seminar includes 3 one-hour sessions broadcast over the World Wide Web featuring as Faculty Marshall Kapp, JD, Professor of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology at Wright State University. This "On Demand" Web seminar is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week starting Feb. 10, 2003

Continuing education credit for the Seminar is available for nurses, nursing home administrators, social workers, care and case managers, counselors, and other professionals. Additional web seminars include "The Secrets of Aging: Body, Mind, Longevity and Society," "Dementia and Diversity," and more. For information on cost and registration for all web seminars, visit:
http://www.asaging.org/webseminars/

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WEB SITES TO SEE

RELIGION AND AGING. To read the essay "The Soul of Gerontology: Recent Writing on Religion and Aging" by H.R. Moody visit: http://www.hrm Moody.com/art3.html

TRANSPERSONAL INTERNET. For an "Online Guide to the Transpersonal Internet" visit:
http://www.atpweb.org/hti.html

BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS. On autobiographical memory, psychological development across the life span, and concern for future generations: http://www.johnkotre.com

BOOKS ABOUT LATE-LIFE LEARNING. See Third Age Press Books at:
http://www.thirdagepress.co.uk

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BOOKS OF INTEREST

AGING WELL: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development, by George E. Vaillant, M.D. (Little, Brown, 2002). An important contribution based on the landmark Harvard longitudinal study of lives. See:
http://www.twbookmark.com/books/27/0316989363/

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WHEN YOU GROW UP? by Dorothy Cantor
(Little, Brown, 2001).


THE ETHICS OF MEMORY, by Avishai Margalit (Harvard Univ. Press, 2002). Philosophical treatise on how individual and collective memory sustains our sense of humanity.

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SPEAKERS BUREAU on AGING

A national speakers bureau, "NextAge Speakers," features nationally known authors such as Marc Freedman, Wendy Lustbader, Bill Thomas, Robert Blancato, and Beth McLeod. Many speakers address issues of humanistic gerontology, including lifelong learning, the arts, and spirituality. NextAge Speakers operates on a cooperative, low-cost basis so speakers are affordable for nonprofit groups. A free e-newsletter is also available. For more information, visit the website at:
http://www.NextAgeSpeakers.com

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E-NEWSLETTER: SOUL OF BIOETHICS

A new monthly e-newsletter, "The Soul of Bioethics," is now published by the Institute for Human Values in Aging. The newsletter focuses on holistic approaches to care in later life, including spiritual dimensions of applied ethics. For a sample copy or free subscription, contact: soulofbioethics@yahoo.com

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CULTURAL GERONTOLOGY SYMPOSIUM

The 4th International Symposium on Cultural Gerontology will take place in Tampere, Finland on May 24-27, 2003. The symposium's theme is "The Cultural in Gerontology: Challenge, Approaches and Methods." More information about the symposium can be found at: http://www.uta.fsubmissionssi/cuge/

The deadline for submission of papers and presentations is Jan. 15, 2003.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ELDERHOSTEL: Mapping Your Sacred Journey. (Bisbee, Arizona, Jan. 5-10, 2003). In this Elderhostel program each day begins with Chi Kung exercise to improve health, followed by a writing workshop intended to help participants find the core of authentic selfhood. Topics covered include Apache modes of sacred knowledge and creative expression through sound and art. For more information, see: http://www.elderhostel.org

WISDOM IN AGING (Sarasota, FL, Jan. 10 to March 28, 2003). Antique Center 2nd floor, Intersection 41 and 301 in Sarasota. C.G. Jung (Modern Man in Search of a Soul and Memories, Dreams, Reflections); Peter Berger (The Socialization of Reality) and E.F. Schumacher (Small is Beautiful, Guide for the Perplexed). Sponsored by Pierian Spring Academy, P.O. Box 11012, Sarasota, FL 34278 For more information, contact: jlarus@aol.com or call (941) 587-1052

BODY, MIND, SPIRIT HEALING RETREAT. (Jan. 27 - 31, 2003, St. Louis, MO) St. Joseph Retreat Center. Relaxation, meditation,
healing prayer, imagery and fantasy, storytelling, drawing, labyrinth, and reminiscing. For information and registration, call Sandra at the Johnson Institute at (636) 273-6898 or visit: http://www.GodHelpMyIllness.com


PALLIATIVE CARE: Multidisciplinary Approach to Palliative Care, Pain, and Symptom Management Conference. (Houston, TX, Jan. 31-Feb. 1, 2003). Sponsored by University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. R. Lee Clark Clinic and Hickey Auditorium, Houston, Texas. For more information, see: http://www.mdanderson.org/~meetings.

ASA WEB SEMINARS: Legal and Ethical Issues of Aging. Feb. 11, 2003 (1 PM Eastern Time, 10 AM Pacific Time) 75 minutes. "Liability and Risk Management Issues in Aging Services." Presenter: Marshall Kapp, JD, Professor, Department of Community Health and Director, Office of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology, Wright State University Schoo, Dayton, OH.

Additional Web Seminars: "Legal and Ethical Aspects of Decision Making by and for Older Persons" (Feb. 18 and "Ethical and Legal Issues involved in Healthcare and Personal and Financial Decision Making" (Feb. 25).

For details and registration, visit: http://www.asaging.org/webseminars/websem.cfm?EventID=4439


"Is man immortal?" the Buddha was asked.

"Not the man you know," was the reply.
This electronic newsletter, edited by Harry (Rick) Moody, is published by the Institute for Human Values in Aging at the International Longevity Center-USA and co-sponsored by the Brookdale Center on Aging of Hunter College and the Institute for Medical Humanities, Galveston, Texas. The Newsletter contains items of interest about humanistic gerontology; it does not publish original writing but is limited to brief and timely announcements. To submit items of interest or request subscription changes, contact hrmoody@yahoo.com

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To see the Archive of previous issues of this newsletter, visit the ILC website at: http://www.ilcusa.org/pub/news.htm

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