

The Wisdom Years

BY CHARLES WILKINSON

A few years back I spent what could have been a life-changing, autumn weekend in Michigan. A good friend and I drove over in his Miata, knowing we were to share an experience with each other and about 18 strangers that would help us all transition into post middle-age, a more realistic label for the so-called golden years. An intensive two-day workshop on aging, The Wisdom Years weekend sought to help us look at the changing colors in ourselves while surrounded by the changing colors of nature.

Most of what we shared is a blur by now but I remember taking time to go inward, looking back that we might better look ahead, sharing our stories and looking at the years to come. Most spoke of dreams, others fears, all of us concerns about aging.

There were two therapist-facilitators and a team of "alums" from previous weekends. The setting was ideal; the expe-

rience demanding; time quickly became a non-factor. For two very intense days, we became vulnerable to ourselves and one another.

Looking back, I realize the entire weekend was all about trusting – and truth. At that time in my life I was strong on the former but not quite ready or able, for many reasons, to name and confront key parts of my self. But the weekend was not a waste.

Comes a time in most everyone's life to stop and go inward, to look at one's story – all of it – and own and embrace it, realizing that what lies ahead will emerge from it. The lessons of one's past when explored and learned from can provide wisdom for the years ahead. Though I was unable to admit it at the time, I have come to know my past contains all of me, the truth of me, and that what lies ahead will reveal the rest of me.

Aging, I am learning, is not the end of anything, or the beginning of an end. It is

another part of a journey toward... whatever. Within the colors that surrounded us that weekend was a life force that goes relentlessly forward, through another winter toward another spring.

George Bernard Shaw said, "Youth is wasted on the young." I sometimes feel a truth in his words but am coming to realize that aging should not be wasted on the rest of us, especially those on the short end of time.

Growing old is not an event; it is a process during which one needs all the wisdom to be had to sense the fullness of a life. The autumn, sunset years ahead should be about harvest and gratitude and the turning of a journey toward even new discoveries.

I know now, far more clearly than I could that weekend, that the Wisdom Years experience widened my eyes that eventually I could begin to see the meanings of the past and the promise of the years ahead.