

INTRODUCTION

*Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.*

—TENNYSON, "Crossing the Bar"

GROWING OLDER OFTEN FEELS like skating on thin ice. For most of us living has generally been on firm ground. Much of the time we were pretty sure of what we had to do: go to school, get a job, make friends, stay healthy, support ourselves, and perhaps raise a family. Our charter was by and large clear and immediate, often compelling. Moving into the second half of life can be unsettling. This new terrain prompts perplexing questions. How far can I go? In which direction? What might I expect? What risks am I prepared to take? What's safe? What's dangerous? Do I have enough insurance? Enough money? Am I really ready for this?

We have yet to meet anyone racing ahead. How about you? Are you dying to be older? Most of us are proceeding tentatively, sometimes reluctantly. Some wish they could reverse direction, but that fantasy is delusional. Yet there is a good chance that what's ahead is considerably better than anything you've imagined. What does better look like? How can you achieve it? That's what this book is about.

Research into adult development and aging indicates that the landscape for the second half of our lives has been changing dramatically and positively. Your expectations, fears, and questions about the next period in your life are most likely based on past experiences and assumptions out of touch with new developments in the life course. As you skate along, chances are that what's ahead can be much different than your fears and prejudices might suggest. Your next journey holds more promise than you have prepared for. Does it really? How do we know?

Recent international studies have reported about not only increased life expectancy but also positive alternatives in aging. In this context our research for over twenty years has been tracking people who have been creatively redesigning their lives after fifty and exhibiting new, personal growth just when many people might—as conditioned by negative stereotypes of aging—expect decline. These creative people tell us, “This is the best time in my life.” What they have been doing after fifty represents a possibility that previous generations for the most part simply did not have. We are talking about a first-time-in-human-history opportunity.

Perhaps the most pivotal discovery in our research has been that after fifty you and we have creative potential that enables us to direct and shape our lives to experience more meaning, enjoyment, purpose, vitality, and fulfillment than we could have expected as we crossed the bar into maturity. Outdated, debilitating aging stereotypes still proliferate in our culture and need to be replaced with reliable guidelines. In this book we show you how pioneers on the frontier of new possibilities have been creatively changing course, enabling them to transform the process of growing older in a radically different, highly positive way. Middle age is moving up from forty to our fifties and sixties.

The people in our research are showing us that now *older is much younger than we thought*. We all can learn from them. We shall provide you with perspectives and practical illustrations that you can apply to your own distinctive version of the second half of life, aging, and retirement, or whatever you choose to call it.

This book extends the research of Bill Sadler's last book, based on a twelve-year longitudinal study of several dozen people who redesigned their third age, a new middle period in the life course. Although a small sample, these people represent a broad mix of women and men. Their stories in *The Third Age: Six Principles of Growth and Renewal After Forty* showed alternatives to conventional patterns of middle age and aging. Do you think people are genetically programmed to begin degenerating in the fifth or sixth decade? Is a midlife crisis inevitable? Are human beings over the hill after turning fifty?

That's not what we have found. Individuals can initiate a process of growth that leads in a positive direction, postponing and transforming aging. The people in the last book and in *Changing Course* have been experiencing a *second growth* through the third age. How have they managed to do this? By carefully examining their development, Bill discovered six principles of second growth. His book shows how these principles can operate to initiate growth in all of us.

Readers from around the world have reported how that book has helped them recast a life scenario, clarify options to usual aging, get in touch with creative potential, experience renewal, and take practical steps for self-realization in the third age. We now have a new framework for thinking about the next stages in the life course; and the stories illustrate how the six principles of growth and renewal can be applied.

A year after *The Third Age* appeared, a dozen business professionals formed an enterprise to apply the growth principles

to the workforce. Through consulting, coaching, workshops, seminars, and retreats, The Center for Third Age Leadership aims to help individuals and organizations design a productive and fulfilling third age. These programs based on the six principles have proven to be particularly appropriate for managing the transition from second age to third age, and for third age planning. Jim Krefft, a former executive and business consultant, and President of The Center for Third Age Leadership, joined Bill to continue learning from people who exemplify the option of creative growth in maturity. Our collaboration generated the additional research underlying this new book.

Based on our ongoing research, we believe that as people grow older they should want more, not less from life. Don't you? Don't we all want not just normal development but *optimal development* through the second half of life? That's our assumption. How can we achieve it? In the research that underlies this book, we've been asking: How can a person navigate life after fifty to expand her or his boundaries and keep growing? And how can second growth influence the way an individual designs and experiences retirement?

You should know that assumptions that most of us had ten or twenty years ago are no longer appropriate. Those ideas are now more likely than not just plain wrong. People today have options, resources, and experiences that previous generations did not have. In growing up, most of us have learned outdated lessons about growing older. It's time for us to unlearn those lessons and develop a different perspective.

When you look at your life as you grow older, where do you put the emphasis? On *growing*, or on *older*?

Instead of the latter, we have learned how you and we can creatively sustain growing for a fulfilling life after fifty. For most of us that emphasis on growing calls for redefining

retirement, or whatever we choose to call it, as mindfully as we prepared for life and careers in the second age.

The main purpose of *Changing Course* is to help you figure out how to do that preparation. We offer insights, principles, and practical guidelines to help you reflect on, dream about, and plan for charting a new course in your life. This book is different from the previous one in several ways.

First, most people whose stories fill this book are older than those cited in the previous one. *The Third Age* reported mostly on people growing impressively through their fifties. In *Changing Course* we have been asking people now in their sixties and seventies: how do you keep on growing? Some of these people were in the first book; others we have met more recently. Their stories show us how we can transform aging in the third quarter of our lives.

Second, the focus has shifted to making a successful transition into a new phase, often called retirement. The people in this book have been addressing the challenges of aging and retirement by *redefining both*. Most don't even think of themselves as retired. Many despise the term *retirement* and even refuse to use that label. Maybe you're like them, and dread taking retirement like getting a bad cold in winter. Our book offers options for finding your own cure for the common retirement.

The stories here are about people who have been able to free themselves of misconceptions and stereotypes and who have applied creative thinking about both their third age and retirement. This self-help book is also more practical than the last one, with both stories and lessons at the end of each chapter. We show how you, too, can tap your creative potential to change course for an adventuresome journey into your fifties, sixties, and seventies.

Third, the social landscape has been dramatically changing in the past ten years, affecting how we think about

redesigning retirement and our lives. The new landscape offers all of us challenges, opportunities, and options never before available. In the twenty-first century we are in a new era that calls for radical rethinking about our life course, and revolutionary self-redirection.

Part One explores challenges and opportunities in the second half of life. First we look at retirement in its current setting and talk about why we need to redefine the concept. The second chapter shares what we have been learning from research about alternatives to usual patterns of aging. Understanding an alternative perspective can dramatically affect your experience of the third age, of retirement, and of life completion in the fourth age. In chapter 3 Bill updates his discovery of the six principles of second growth and shows how they apply to changing course.

With this new scenario, Part Two presents possibilities: stories of people who have inspired and instructed us in the experience of changing course. Chapter 6, in addition, also shows how individuals, professions, and organizations can benefit from our findings and apply them to *third age careers* that foster both personal and organizational development. In the final chapter Jim offers specific steps for third agers approaching retirement—how to get ready to change course—including five major tasks of *third age planning*. Each task serves as a countermeasure to one of five big risks for third agers approaching retirement.

We have filled this book with practical ideas for individuals, couples, families, and groups to shape a whole new way of navigating life after fifty. We hope that you use the book to stimulate your own fresh thinking about your third age and retirement, clarify your growth possibilities, and give yourself a new mental framework for planning the next phase in your life.

Our title is a metaphor for how you can adapt to *growing* as you get older. This is your voyage and your call. So get out your navigational charts and equipment—it's time to change course.