

**OLDER ADULTS' NARRATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF
THEIR EXPERIENCES OF BEING VITALLY ENGAGED IN
LIVING**

by

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ABSTRACT

Ten women and men between the ages of 69 and 85 participated in a study that explored how older adults narrate and understand their experiences of being vitally engaged in living. The research question was: *How Do Men and Women Seventy Years of Age and Older Narrate and Understand the Experience of Being Vitally Engaged in Living?* The purpose was to reveal the strengths that some older individuals possess and learn how they manage to cope with the many losses and challenges of later life while still being able to engage in living full, meaningful, and vital lives. Participants were chosen who were articulate in English, perceived themselves to be living vital lives, and had no cognitive impairment, mental illness, or physical disability that would exclude them from being interviewed for a long period of time.

Positive psychology formed the theoretical framework for the study. A narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodology for the study because it is founded on studying individuals in-depth, focuses on the whole both in context and in time, and is accomplished through the stories participants tell and the meaning they make of those stories. One or, if needed, two interactive narrative interviews were conducted.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. A holistic-content approach was used to read, interpret, and analyze each participant's story which resulted in ten individual written narratives. Validation interviews were conducted with the participants to check the rigor of the individual narratives. A categorical-content approach was used to construct the common themes in living a vital life across all the participants' narratives which resulted in ten common themes and subthemes therein. This resulted in one written common themes narrative. Validation interviews were conducted with the participants, peer reviewers, and expert reviewers to check the rigor of the common themes narrative.

PREFACE

The research in this dissertation involved human subjects and as such, was reviewed and approved by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board prior to the start of the research. The number of the original certificate pertaining to the research in this dissertation is: H09-00317.

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Finally, I am very blessed to have the love, support, help, and understanding of my family—my husband Andrew, and my children, Luke and Anni—to pursue my dreams. They are compelling storytellers and a critical source from which I draw strength to live a vital life.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I delight in conversing with the very old. They have gone before us on a road we too perhaps must take, and I think we should inquire of them what sort of road it is, rugged and difficult, or smooth and easily traveled.

- Socrates in Plato's *The Republic*

Statement of the Problem

The baby boomer generation is about to swell the population of older adults like no other time in history and older adults are forecast to live significantly longer than previous generations (Brown, 2002; Hartman-Stein & Potkanowicz, 2003; Lynn & Adamson, 2003; Thompson & Foth, 2003). Increased life expectancy and a decline in fertility (Munnell, 2004) mean that baby boomers are impacting the North American age profile more than any other age group (Needham et al., 2005). By the year 2030 the most significant bulk of the population will be over 65 years of age. The number of adults aged 85+ is expected to quadruple in the first half of this century (Hetzel & Smith, 2001). In light of the demographic realities of our aging population and increasing life expectancies, an important challenge for society is to be aware of and understand how older adults achieve and maintain vital and satisfying lives. As the population of adults over 65 swells during the next thirty years, it is incumbent upon the field of Counselling Psychology to address the needs and issues of older adults—particularly in terms of enhanced quality of life. This is the focus of this research.

Research reveals that the longer people live, the greater the number of losses and challenges they must face and the more vulnerable they are to having a diminished quality of life (Baltes & Baltes, 1998; Bukov et al., 2002; Lang et al., 2002). Adults in old age are in the position of having to balance gains and losses. As they enter later adulthood (85+) this becomes even more difficult as losses compound and dramatically outweigh gains (Baltes & Baltes). It is not surprising then that, to date, the study of older adults has overwhelmingly been approached from a negative or deficits lens rather than from a positive or benefits lens (Coleman, 2002;

Hurd, 1999; Katz & Marshall, 2003; Morell, 2003; Pfeiffer, 1999; Wray, 2003). Most of the literature on aging focuses on the health problems, social deficits and lifestyle challenges that are associated with growing old. In turning to the developmental literature, only a handful of researchers and theorists have addressed the issue of positive aging in later life.

In my study, however, I addressed aging from a strengths versus deficits perspective. Specifically, through the lens of positive psychology, I examined how men and women over the age of 70 construct vital lives. The overarching question that guided this research was: **How do men and women seventy years of age and older narrate and understand the experience of being vitally engaged in living?**

In chapter two, I critiqued the pertinent literature on adult development, positive psychology, aging well or successfully, and vitality in-depth. For now, I have presented a brief overview and synthesis of four relevant theories/models of psychosocial lifespan development, what we know about vital living in later life, the factors associated with vital living, and the limitations of the current literature. Overall, lifespan psychosocial theorists and researchers studying adaptive aging (e.g., Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Carstensen, 2003; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Erikson et al., 1986; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Vaillant, 2002) postulate that the mastering of lifespan developmental tasks are necessary for aging well and vitally. The above theorists also posit that there needs to be a dynamic interconnection between the older individual and society for vital aging to occur. These same theorists propose that being vitally engaged in life, what Erikson and Erikson refer to as maintaining a grand-generative function, is essential for achieving integrity and wisdom. According to Erikson and Erikson, integrity is the achievement of a sense of life “coherence and wholeness” (p. 65) in the face of significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social losses that are inherent in the aging process. According to Baltes and Carstensen, Erikson and Erikson, Erikson et al., Levinson and Vaillant, achieving integrity is

considered to be the major developmental task for older adults to master in order to adapt, grow, and live vitally. These theorists, to lesser or greater degrees, also posit that relational involvement is key for development, growth, and vital living in late adulthood. Baltes, and Baltes and Carstensen propose that older individuals who are able to maximize gains (positive goals, events, results) and minimize losses (negative goals, events, results) appear to age more successfully and vitally than individuals who are unable to balance losses and gains.

In order for individuals to live vitally engaged lives in their seventies, eighties, nineties and beyond, they must “reflect vital reaction to change, to disease and to conflict” (Vaillant, 2002, p. 15). According to Vaillant, six protective factors predictive of healthy and vital aging are: never having smoked or having stopped when young; having an adaptive coping style or using mature defenses; having not abused alcohol; maintaining a healthy weight; having a stable marriage; doing some exercise; and more years of post secondary education. Underscoring these protective qualities are four personal qualities essential to aging vitally: future orientation (being able to hope, anticipate and plan); being capable of gratitude and forgiveness; the capacity for love and empathy; and wanting to be in a relationship with others (Vaillant).

The above theorists and/or models provide some indication that, to lesser or greater degrees, older adults can balance the losses and gains inherent in aging and live vital, satisfying, and fulfilling lives. They also suggest developmental tasks and dispositional factors that may be necessary to live vitally in late adulthood. However, more research is needed to determine and understand what it means to live vital and satisfying lives in late adulthood. Much of the lifespan developmental research on late life development and vital living was done with younger adults, including college students and young and middle-aged adults. More research regarding late life development and what it means to live vital and satisfying lives as older adults needs to be done with individuals over the age of 70. There is still a significant gap in the literature and in

professional training programs regarding the psychological strengths of older adults and how these strengths potentially aid individuals in living vital lives. We need to know more about what members of the older generations consider important, or even essential, to vital living.

Theoretical Framework for this Study

Consistent with a strengths versus a deficits focus, positive psychology formed the theoretical framework for this research. Positive psychology is the study of positive subjective experience or emotions, positive personal character traits, and societal and/or governmental virtues and the institutions that model civic virtues (Fredrickson, 2001; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman et al., 2005). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi define positive psychology in the following way:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (p. 5).

The aim of positive psychology is to study the “full spectrum of human experience” (Gable & Haidt, p. 105) by acknowledging that human suffering exists and focusing on positive mental health.

Seligman et al. (2005) credit the work of various people for contributing to the theoretical framework upon which positive psychology was founded (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Erikson, 1963, 1982; Jahoda, 1958; Maslow 1954, 1962; Rogers, 1951; Ryff & Singer, 1996; Vaillant,

1977). Gable and Haidt also include William James (1902), and Cowan's (2000) work as contributing to the theory of positive psychology. Proponents of positive psychology seek to understand and nurture the factors that create flourishing individuals, institutions, communities and societies (e.g., Cameron et al., 2003; Easterbrook, 2003; Fredrickson, 2001; Gardner et al., 2001; Kahneman et al., 1999; Murray, 2003; Vaillant, 2002). This fits so well with the notion of vital living in later life. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, there is a paucity of research in psychology about "what makes life worth living" (p. 5).

Under the umbrella of the term positive psychology, researchers have gathered together pertinent theory and research clarifying what constitutes a well-lived or worthwhile life (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001; Peterson & Park, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Peterson and Seligman (2004) have developed the CSV (*Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*), a description and classification of virtues and dispositional strengths that contribute to human flourishing. In the CSV, Peterson and Seligman noted and classified the following six virtues and 24 character strengths that are endorsed by almost every culture world-wide:

1. Wisdom and knowledge—Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective
2. Courage—Authenticity, bravery, persistence, zest
3. Humanity—Kindness, love, social intelligence
4. Justice—Fairness, leadership, teamwork
5. Temperance—Forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation
6. Transcendence—Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness (in Peterson & Seligman, p. 412).

Baltes and Staudinger (2000) and Vaillant (2002) suggest that the above individual strengths and virtues evolve over a whole lifespan. Proponents of positive psychology propose that positive psychology illuminates qualities that are life enhancing and bring joy and meaning to life such as

“hope, wisdom, creativity, future mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and perseverance” (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Purpose of the Study

In this study I hoped to learn how older adults manage to cope with the many losses and challenges of later life while still being able to engage in living vital and satisfying lives. The purpose of this study was to explore how adults aged 70 and older narrate and understand their experiences of being vitally engaged in living. Ryan and Frederick (1997) defined subjective vitality as feeling alive, being full of energy and being alert. Furthermore, vitality is “energy that is perceived to emanate from the self” (p. 535). Ryan and Frederick reported that the Chinese concept of *Chi* is, in part, “a vital force or energy that is the source of life, creativity, right action, and harmony” (p. 532). In ancient Japanese culture, vitality was the energy and power called upon to activate physical and mental health (Ryan & Frederick). The English Oxford Dictionary defines the adjective *vital* as: “**1** absolutely necessary; essential. **2** essential for life: *the vital organs*. **3** full of energy; lively.” Based on the work of the theorists and researchers discussed in this chapter—Baltes and Baltes (1998), Carlsen (1991), Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986), Levinson (1978, 1996), Vaillant (2002)—for the purpose of this study Ryan and Frederick’s definition of subjective vitality, which includes the third dictionary definition, was used to guide this enquiry.

By adopting a positive psychology lens in this study, I hoped to reveal the strengths that older individuals possess and to discover ways in which older adults’ lives can be vital, satisfactory, and meaningful. The overarching question that guided this research was: **How do men and women seventy years of age and older narrate and understand the experience of being vitally engaged in living?**

A qualitative study incorporating narrative interviews and researcher journaling was an appropriate/fitting method of inquiry for addressing this research question (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Janesick, 2004; Josselson, Lieblich & McAdams, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Wenger, 2003). By facilitating what Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to as a personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship between researcher and participant, a relationship that revolves around how meaning infuses the human experience, a narrative method was especially appropriate for this study (Josselson et al.). As well, narrative research comprises holistic, in-depth study of certain individuals in a context that is social and is situated in a specific time-space context (Josselson et al.; Kvale; Randall & Mc Kim, 2008; Rubin & Rubin). Narrative research facilitates the detailed and thorough telling and understanding of an individual's personal narrative or story or experience (Josselson et al.; Lieblich et al.; Riessman, 1993). Bruner (1987) pointed out that through narration we “segment and purpose-build the very events of a life” (p. 15). The narrative approach was well-suited for both learning about how some older adults live vitally while managing and coping with the many losses and challenges that are a part of everyday later life, and how they make meaning from their experiences of being vitally engaged in living. In chapter 3, I addressed in-depth what narrative research is, what it provides and why it was commensurate with the purpose and question of this study.

This study was informed by the experts on aging themselves—older adults who perceived themselves as experiencing the phenomenon of vital involvement in life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Warren & Karner, 2005). Surprisingly, the voices of older adults have seldom been included in the literature on aging (Higginson & Carr, 2001; Fry, 2000; Sastre, 1999; Wilhelmson et al., 2005). As Wilhelmson et al. and Fry point out, there is a large body of literature dealing with the importance of quality of

life among older adults, yet the voices of the subjective ‘experts’ are missing in that literature. There is a scarcity of literature and research that actually asks older adults themselves what contributes to or constitutes vital engagement in life and how they are managing to live vital and satisfying lives in the face of the many losses and challenges that typically occur in the later decades of life (Carr & Higginson; Fry; Sastre; Wilhelmson et al.).

Therefore, as suggested by Socrates so many centuries ago, in this study I asked the experts—older adults themselves—about their perceptions and experiences of living vital older lives. I sought to understand the participants’ lived experiences from their viewpoint. I explored how older adults identify themselves as, and make meaning of, being vitally engaged in living. During the process of interviewing and researcher journaling, I co-constructed the components, factors or qualities implicated in living vitally. Through the process of listening to older adults narrate their stories of living vitally I began to know what, for the participants, constitutes living vitally in later life.

How individuals experience and make meaning of living vital and satisfying lives is relevant throughout any stage of life. However, this may be particularly important in older adulthood (Erikson & Erikson, 1997) as women and men attempt to achieve a balance between the losses and gains of later life (Baltes & Baltes, 1998; Vaillant, 2002; Wilhelmson et. al, 2005). By asking older adults how they understood and experienced living vitally, I hoped to add their voices and perspectives to the developmental, gerontological and counselling psychology literature. The findings from this study have the potential of providing insights into working with the older adult population from a strengths rather than a deficits perspective.

Nelson (2002) suggests that elders who are coping well psychologically and emotionally even as they face the inevitability of greater physical and social losses, provide hope for all generations that they, too, will be able to face life’s challenges with grace and courage. Randall

and Mc Kim (2008) suggest that aging needs to be examined from the perspective of “actively growing old” (p. 4)—a “growth-focused” (p. 5) perspective. They believe that a perspective of actively aging has been “left largely unexamined” (p. 5). While in her seventies, Betty Friedan (1993) wrote in *The Fountain of Age*: “We have barely even considered the possibilities in age for new kinds of loving intimacy, purposeful work and activity, learning and knowing, community and care” (p. 87). It is my hope that the findings from this research will begin to illuminate some of these possibilities.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this review of the literature I present an overarching picture of the developmental issues, challenges, and tasks during the stage of late adulthood. I identify and clarify what is considered to be necessary for vital involvement in life, well-being, and life satisfaction in late and later adulthood. In the first section I examine how late and later adulthood has been defined chronologically and developmentally. An overview of late and later adulthood developmental tasks, changes and challenges is then presented, and the primary reason that it is important to find meaning and value in one's life in old age is illuminated. In the second section I summarize the primary theoretical models of lifespan development and research findings on late and later adulthood development, and identify some relevant differences in the developmental tasks and trajectories of adult women and men. In the third section I summarize important research findings on successful aging, notably the components or predictors associated with life satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction in late adulthood. In the final section I describe subjective vitality and summarize the findings from the limited literature on vitality in late adulthood.

Late Adulthood, Late Adulthood Tasks and the Importance of Meaning Making

Examining the research on how women and men 65 years of age and older understand their experiences of living a vital life must begin with a description of the phenomenon of late adulthood as posited by theorists and researchers. According to the World Health Organization (2008), most developed nations accept the definition of older person as being the chronological age of 65 or older. At present, the United Nations' definition of older person is 60+ years. Erikson and Erikson (1997), Levinson (1978), and Vaillant (2002) propose that late adulthood begins in the seventh decade (early or mid-sixties) and lasts until the mid-eighties. Later adulthood begins around age 80 according to Levinson (1978), at 85 according to Baltes and Baltes (1998), and in the late 80's according to Erikson and Erikson (1997). However, it is

important to note that a chronological definition of old age is rarely an accurate indication of a person's psychological, biological and/or social age—indices which are considered the fundamental determinants of the older adult's vital engagement in living (Baltes and Baltes, 1998; Vaillant, 2000).

Moving away from chronological age, Aiken (1995), defines old age as the stage of life when there are more losses than gains, when “capacities and opportunities decline rather than expand” (p. 2). The developmental literature indicates that late adulthood is indeed characterized by the experience of physical decline and the increasing likelihood of death and serious illness among spouses, partners, siblings, friends and peers (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 2002). Several theorists concur that a definition of old age must also include the unique characteristics of older individuals, including the diversity of both psychological and physical qualities, the meaning of old age depending upon one's cultural or societal attitudes and expectations, and the older individual's attitude toward life and aging (Aiken; Baltes & Baltes; 1998; Erikson & Erikson; Vaillant).

While acknowledging late adulthood as a distinctive time of both decline and fulfillment, several prominent researchers and theorists (Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Carstensen, 2003; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Vaillant, 2002) have suggested that later life is also potentially a time of growth, change, and development. Levinson and Vaillant proposed that in order to grow personally in late adulthood, it is necessary for the individual to acknowledge that his or her generation is no longer the dominant one and to pass on power to the next generation.

According to Langle (2001), an important task of the older adult is to deal with the process of aging emotionally and cognitively, which includes experiencing aging within one's own realm of understanding. This includes having developed the maturity to “actively let go” (Langle, 2001, p. 214) and find the courage to face uncharted waters. It is necessary to

perceive and understand the world differently in old age through aging lenses that transform the way of “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, cited in Langle, p. 212). In late adulthood, the individual has moved closer to death and is more connected to the process of dying and thus needs to find a way to focus more within him or herself (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 2002). Langle suggests that the most profound task and gain of late adulthood may be to “dwell on oneself” (p. 214) or to discover one’s inner world. The older adult’s discovery of his or her inner world requires being open to change, letting go of preconceived ideas, and making adaptations to their characteristic patterns of being, doing and living.

Based on his longitudinal research on adult development, Levinson (1978) identified another major developmental task of late adulthood as being the creation of a new balance of involvement with self and society. From this perspective, if the older adult can reinvent or recreate his or her “self-in-world” (p. 36), late adulthood can be as unique and fulfilling as all the other life stages (Erikson & Erikson 1997; Friedan, 1993; Levinson; Vaillant, 2002). Recreation of self-in-world requires the older person to reflect upon and comprehend anew, his or her life context in order to develop different attitudes regarding her or his level of engagement or disengagement in living (Langle, 2001).

Maintaining a grand-generative function is another major task of late adulthood that has been identified by Erikson and Erikson (1997) and Vaillant (2002). Older adults need to maintain a vital involvement in living; they need to take care of the generations that precede them or, according to Kotre (1984), “to invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self” (p. 10). According to Vaillant, this stage requires the older adult to “take other people inside” (p. 139). In later adulthood, an individual’s grand-generative function can be maintained by modeling for the younger generations and for his or her peers “wisdom and personal nobility” (Levinson, p. 39). According to Levinson, the older adult needs to reach the

ultimate involvement with his or her 'self,' come to terms with it, and prepare to face dying and death.

From this perspective, finding meaning and value in one's life in order to come to terms with death is imperative for psychosocial development in late adulthood (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Langle, 2001; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 2002). According to these theorists, viewing life as being and having been meaningful and valuable underpins one of the primary developmental tasks of late adulthood—the attainment of a sense of integrity regarding the older adult's entire life. From this perspective the mastering of integrity is essential for the attainment of wisdom (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Erikson & Erikson; Levinson; Vaillant). Integrity and wisdom are the “strengths of old age” (Erikson & Erikson, p. 5). Erikson and Erikson and Vaillant postulated that in order to attain integrity the older adult must live with vitality and consciousness/mindfulness, build and sustain tactful and insightful relationships, and be able to adapt and be open to change. According to these researchers, the major developmental task of later adulthood is for the individual to come to terms with or make peace with the personal process of dying. This includes preparing for his or her death through finding new meaning in life and death, generally, and one's own life and death, specifically. In later adulthood the individual continues to grow and develop through the integration of all aspects of his or her life and by personally responding to existential issues and questions such as meaning in life (Langle).

Major Theories of Adult Development and Aging

In this section, I discuss the major theories and models of adult development and aging, synthesize the findings, and critique the strengths and weaknesses of the theories/work of Baltes (2003) and Baltes and Carstensen (2003), Carlsen (1991), Erikson (1982), Erikson and Erikson (1997), Vaillant (2002), and Levinson (1978, 1996).

Erikson (1982) and Erikson and Erikson (1997) developed a psychosocial theory of human lifespan development based upon the life historical data of approximately 50 healthy American children born in 1928 and the first half of 1929. The data came from the Guidance Study of the Institute of Human Development during the 1940's. Erikson continued to prospectively study both the children and their parents through more than five decades. Based upon the analysis of the life historical data over more than fifty years, Erikson (1982) first proposed eight major stages (infancy to old age) of psychosocial development spanning from infancy to old age. Erikson and Erikson (1997) subsequently added a ninth stage to the life cycle specific to the eighth and ninth decades. Erikson proposed that each developmental stage involved a struggle between two contrary dispositions—syntonic and dystonic. Syntonic tendencies are the positive characteristics or dispositions that support personal development, encourage purpose and goal setting, honor self-respect, and celebrate industriousness. Syntonic dispositions protect us when we are faced with and/or challenged by the dystonic or negative dispositions that undermine personal growth and discourage purposefulness, self-respect and commitment. According to Eriksonian theory, there must be a balance between the two contrary dispositions in order for healthy psychosocial development and growth to occur. Erikson found that psychosocial strengths emerge from the struggles of syntonic and dystonic tendencies, especially during the following three stages of life: hope (infancy), fidelity (adolescence), and care (adulthood).

Erikson and Erikson (1997) posited that stage eight (old age) involves a balance between integrity and despair or disgust creating the strength of wisdom which they describe as “informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself (p. 61)”; “coherence and wholeness” (p. 65); and “integrality, a tendency to keep things together” (p. 65). Erikson and Erikson proposed that in the final stage nine (old age in one's eighties and nineties), the dystonic

elements of despair/disgust have primacy and power in a person's life. In the ninth stage the following events are theorized to occur: personal autonomy and independence are significantly challenged; the individual's pride and confidence are shaken; and hope and trust, the foundation upon which psychosocial health rests, no longer provide the strong support they did in previous stages. In this final stage of development Erikson and Erikson suggested that facing down despair and disgust with "faith and appropriate humility" (p. 106) may be the only way to achieve integrity and wisdom.

Erikson's (1982) and Erikson and Erikson's (1997) research findings are empirically grounded and provide a framework for understanding psychosocial development throughout the lifespan. Erikson suggested that throughout a series of stages, psychosocially healthy adults are engaged in life within a widening social perspective. With regard to older adults, this means that while their social realm (friends and acquaintances) may be narrowing, their social perspective is widening beyond the self to include interest, concern and action in relation to others in the world. According to Erikson, development and growth are possible even in the eighth and ninth stages. He was the first social scientist to conceptualize the phenomenon of adult development as one of growth rather than decline—a perspective which fits well with the focus and underlying assumptions of my research. A major criticism of Erikson's theory is that it doesn't include a feminist perspective (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Gilligan, 1986; Tennant, 2000; Vander Ven, 1999). Gilligan and Vander Ven are also critical of Erikson's theory because it doesn't consider a constructivist perspective and doesn't acknowledge how cultural factors and social values might potentially impact individual functioning. Smith-Osborne (2007) and Vander Ven also note that stage theory is somewhat limited by its rigid view of development and growth as unfolding sequentially and of one stage of life following another in a predictable pattern.

My study is informed by the research and theory of the Eriksons (1982, 1997) in a number of important ways. Erikson's psychosocial theory of the human life cycle includes the eighth and ninth stages, old and older age, respectively. Adults living in their eighth and ninth stages of life are the focus of my study. Erikson also conceptualized adult development as growth rather than decline. He posited that progress is possible into one's seventies, eighties and nineties through the achievement of the tasks of the last stages of the life cycle. Vital living older adults may be mastering the work/tasks that Erikson suggested are necessary for healthy psychosocial aging. Also inherent in Erikson's theory is the conceptualization of vital living older adults possessing positive personal traits of character and having positive subjective experience or emotions, all of which are consistent with the assumptions/tenets of positive psychology. My research is informed by the theoretical framework of positive psychology.

Through the "Study of Adult Development at Harvard," Vaillant (2002) has been able to empirically study Erikson's research and theory, and to build upon it. Vaillant's (2002) Harvard Medical School prospective research integrated three cohorts of men and women who were studied continuously for six to eight decades (from childhood to old age). The research examined the basic components of adult development and looked at the health and happiness of hundreds of individuals from a variety of backgrounds. The first sample consisted of 268 male Harvard graduates born around 1920 who were studied for nearly sixty years or until their deaths. The participants received questionnaires every two years, provided reports of physical exams every five years, and were interviewed approximately every 15 years. Their wives and children also participated in the research by providing details of their own lives and observations about their husbands or fathers. The second research sample (1939) consisted of 456 inner city youth who were studied at ages 14, 17, 25, 32 and then re-interviewed at age 47 (1975). Afterwards, they responded to biennial questionnaires until the year 2000 when they were between the ages of 68

and 74. They provided reports of physical exams every five years. The third research sample was from the Stanford Terman Study (1922) which consisted of 672 gifted children most of whom were born between 1908 and 1914 and were studied for almost eighty years by Lewis Terman and colleagues. The participants filled out questionnaires every five years and were interviewed in 1940 and 1950. In 1987, Vaillant re-interviewed a representative subsample of 90 women from the Terman study.

Vaillant (2002) conceptualized his model of adult psychosocial development as a revision of Erikson's theory using the term developmental tasks rather than stages. He concluded that adult psychosocial development consists of six adult life tasks that are generally sequential in nature, must be mastered in order and, similar to Erikson and Erikson (1997), reveal a broadening of social perspective over time. With regard to age, these tasks parallel Erikson's developmental stages. According to Vaillant (2002), adult psychosocial development evolves through the mastering of six developmental tasks. The first life task is development of an identity or a sense of an individual's self. The second life task is intimacy or learning how to build close reciprocal and enduring emotional bonds with a life partner. The third life task is career consolidation which requires the growth of personal identity in order to develop a social identity within the world of work. The fourth life task is generativity which, according to Vaillant, requires the individual to give him or herself away or to selflessly guide the next generation. Vaillant proposed that generativity can only be realized when a person has mastered the first three life tasks. He suggested that the potential for one's seventies to be a satisfactory and fulfilling time was tripled if the task of generativity was mastered. Keeper of the meaning is the fifth developmental task proposed by Vaillant and involves teaching about the past in meaningful ways. Vaillant suggested that it can only be mastered if an older person develops an ever-widening social radius that extends out of his or her immediate community. The sixth life

task posited by Vaillant is integrity. He asserted that it can be acquired only through reflection upon, and acceptance of, an individual's life cycle as it has unfolded.

Vaillant's (2002) research findings are empirically grounded, and similar to Erikson and Erikson (1997), provide a "road map" (p. 50) for understanding adult psychosocial development and making sense of our personal selves as well as the selves of others. Like Erikson and Erikson, Vaillant acknowledged that adaptive psychosocial development in late adulthood requires that the older adult find a balance between independence and dependence, seeks to give deeper meaning to his or her life, and achieves a sense of integrity by reviewing his or her life and accepting or coming to terms with the good and the bad. Consistent with Erikson and Erikson, Vaillant suggested that older adults who have not continued to grow "beyond" (p. 50) themselves (e.g., generative, conscientious, locally and globally, and spiritual reflection) may be overwhelmed by the substantial losses of old age.

The significance of Vaillant's research and expansion of Erikson's theory in light of my study is that Vaillant's work also views human development as lifelong growth, incorporates a lens of positive psychology, and highlights the importance of late life development. By illuminating and adding the task of 'Keeper of the Meaning' to his theory of adult psychosocial development, Vaillant clarifies what Erikson implied: the necessity of becoming both wise and just in late adulthood. In other words, in the seventh and eighth decades, individuals grow through preserving their culture and its institutions—the "conservation and preservation of the collective products of mankind" (Vaillant, p. 48). Becoming concerned for a social world that radiates beyond their immediate circle of friends, family and community may be indicative of vital living for older adults. However, Vaillant's expansion of Erikson's theory of human development has been criticized because the sample group was not representative of society as a whole (Gilligan, 1993). Gilligan noted that Vaillant choose to use all-male research samples at

the theory-building stage of his research of human development and they were drawn from a privileged group (male Harvard graduates) both socioeconomically and educationally. As well, similar to Erikson, Vaillant's conceptualization of adult psychosocial development is limited by not including feminist and constructivist perspectives and or the influence of cultural factors on human development (Smith-Osborne, 2007).

Building on the work of the above-mentioned theorists, Baltes (2003) and Baltes and Carstensen (2003) adopted a social gerontology perspective focused on lifespan development. These theorists added another dimension to lifespan development by widening the focus of the “theoretically normative outcome that has seriously limited our understanding of successful ageing” by proposing a process-oriented meta-model for the process of adaptive aging referred to as the selective optimization with compensation (SOC) model. The SOC meta-model was based on research done at the Max Planck Institute of Human Development in Berlin as well as a review of relevant research and literature. The theorists looked at work on socioemotional selectivity theory and the concepts of interindividual variability and intraindividual plasticity (Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Carstensen, 2003). As well, they reviewed the literature on successful development in the following areas: biological, social and psychological systems; sports, leisure, job and family domains; and social integration, self-actualization and cognitive performance tasks.

In their SOC meta-model, Baltes and colleagues (2003) posit that every process of human development involves a concurrence and reciprocity of three processes of behavioral regulation: selection, optimization, and compensation. From this perspective, growth is conceptualized to occur through the balancing of gains (desirable goals or outcomes) and losses (undesirable goals or outcomes). Based on the assumption that throughout life individuals seek to maximize gains and minimize losses the process of selection involves the narrowing of the number of areas

(domains and goals) that resources (physical, emotional, social, environmental) are allotted too. The process of optimization involves enhancing resources and reserves. This may occur specific to existing goals or domains or may require investing in new life areas consistent with the developmental tasks and stages of late adulthood. The process of compensation involves either finding new resources to attain the same goal or creating new goals in the face of loss of goal-relevant means. For example, an older adult who has less energy and strength and has difficulty gardening, may still maintain a garden by: growing more perennials and less annuals and having fewer flower beds (instances of selection); working in the garden in the morning when s/he has more energy and working for shorter stretches of time (compensation); and developing more upper body strength through weight training and more flexibility through stretching exercises to increase strength and fitness (optimization).

The SOC meta-model of adult development is consistent with developmental lifespan psychology. In their model of adaptive aging, these theorists agree that adaptive adult development occurs through the mastery of pertinent tasks. However, they propose a broader perspective on adaptive aging by highlighting the heterogeneity of human aging and the diverse ways in which mastery can occur—taking into consideration cultural factors, personal factors, and age/life stage (whether an individual is in late or later adulthood). Baltes and Carstensen (2003) theorize that not only does successful psychosocial development occur through the mastery of tasks/goals during an individual's lifespan, but in addition, diverse norms must be operationalized in order to evaluate whether or not an individual's goals or outcomes have been attained. Therefore, their meta-model broadens lifespan developmental theory by allowing for more variability in successful psychosocial development based on heterogeneity and plasticity—two findings indicative of the aging process (Baltes & Carstensen).

With regard to lifespan developmental theory, Baltes and Carstensen (2003) note that two factors are most pertinent for adulthood and late adulthood: both losses and gains are inherent throughout the entire lifespan, and in particular with advancing age, as biological, cognitive and relational resources decline, the balance between gains and losses shifts toward more losses. They theorize that cultural factors, personal factors, and where an individual is situated along the continuum of the lifespan determine what constitutes gains and losses. The theorists assert that the dynamic interplay of selection, optimization and compensation readily functions to enhance the successful development or growth in older individuals given the depth of personal and environmental resources and reserves upon which they have to draw. Baltes and Carstensen suggest that using the processes of selection, optimization and compensation enables older adults to achieve their goals or outcomes even as they are experiencing accumulating physical, emotional and social losses. However, as resources diminish and individuals become frail and vulnerable, more environmental resources are needed for older adults to maximize goal and outcome mastery.

The work of Baltes (2003) and Baltes and Carstensen (2003) is important to understanding vitality and satisfaction in later life in a number of ways. Contrary to most gerontological research these theorists propose that there is much fluidity in later life. The literature on aging suggests that vitality and aging well depends on an individual's ability to be open to change. By acknowledging personal goal mastery as an adaptive outcome, Baltes and Carstensen acknowledge the individuality and uniqueness of every aging adult and the heterogeneity of the aging population. Theoretically then, it is possible and likely that vitality and satisfaction will be experienced by older adults in many diverse ways. This process-oriented approach focuses not only on outcomes, but also on goals and strategies. Their approach may potentially offer a framework against which older adults' varied strategies for developing and

maintaining vitality and successful aging may be illuminated. While Baltes and Carstensen acknowledge that both losses and gains are inherent in the aging process and that losses unbalance gains in older age, they also propose that “old age holds the potential to be a time when the accumulated knowledge and expertise of a lifetime is invested in the realization of a distilled set of highly meaningful domains and goals” (p. 96). The capacity to lead vital and satisfactory lives in late adulthood may potentially hinge on the ability to distill what is most meaningful to be accomplished for each individual person.

The research and meta-model proposed by Baltes (2003) and Baltes and Carstensen (2003) informs my study in three significant ways. First, as social gerontologists, these theorists studied older adults while some other theories of later life (e.g., Erikson, 1982; Eriksons 1997; Levinson, 1978, 1996) have been based on speculation or the extrapolation of findings from younger populations. Second, unlike the majority of social gerontologists whose work underscores the negative aspects associated with aging (decline and loss), their research illuminates adaptive aging. The model of selective optimization with compensation proposed by Baltes and Carstensen may help provide information on the adaptive process of successful aging. This is particularly relevant to my research because living vitally as an older adult is an adaptive process. Third, in their SOC meta-model these theorists propose that human aging is inherently heterogeneous and adaptive aging cannot be measured according to normative standards. It is possible and likely then, that vital living older adults are a heterogeneous population. While there may be commonalities in the way in which older adults experience living vitally, there will also be unique individual differences—perhaps based on culture, personal and situational factors (e.g. health, family, partnered, divorced, widowed, single), social circumstances (e.g., where they live, engagement with others), and resources (e.g., character/disposition traits, finances, education)

and age/life stage (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). What is missing from the work of Baltes and Baltes and Carstensen are constructionist and feminist perspectives.

I now turn to the research and developmental theory of Levinson (1978, 1996). In 1967, Levinson and his colleagues formed a research team with the primary goal being “to create a developmental perspective on adulthood in men” (Levinson, 1978, p. x). From 1968 to 1970, the research team conducted intensive biographical interviews to collaboratively “construct the story of a man’s life” (Levinson, p. 14). The sample included 40 men aged 35 to 45 years: 10 industry hourly workers; 10 business executives; 10 university biologists; and 10 writers of novels. All the participants were born in America and were, at the time of the study, living in the area between New York and Boston. They came from varied social backgrounds: 15% from disadvantaged urban or rural environments; 42% from stable blue collar or lower-middle-class environments; 32% from middle-class environments; and 10% from wealthy environments.

Over a period of two to three months, one to two hour, audio-recorded biographical interviews were conducted at weekly intervals. Each participant was interviewed five to 10 times. Most of the participants were re-interviewed approximately two years later. Each participant’s life was examined in detail. As well, most of the participants’ wives were interviewed once.

Based on their findings from this study of the lives of men, Levinson et al. (1978) proposed the idea of seasons (periods or stages) making up the life cycle. Change appears to occur within each season and movement from one season to another requires a time of transition. They found that the individual life structure for men unfolds in a fairly orderly way throughout the adult years through an age-linked sequence of eras—each with its own distinctive bio-psycho-social attributes. Men’s lives undergo major changes as they move from one era to the

next. As well, the lives of men are altered within each era. Levinson identified relationships with significant others in the external world as the major elements that make up men's life structure.

Although Levinson's (1978) initial study was limited to men, he subsequently studied the life cycle development of women (Levinson, 1996). In their study of the seasons of a woman's life from adolescence to the mid-forties, Levinson and colleagues (1996) adopted a biographical approach and method. Through intensive interviewing, life stories were gathered from 45 women, aged 35 to 45 years: 15 homemakers from the greater New Haven area; 15 women with corporate-financial careers from the New York City area; and 15 women with academic careers from the New York-Boston Corridor. The researchers met weekly with the women in the study for a series of eight to ten one and one-half to two hour, taped interview sessions.

In Levinson et al.'s (1996) study of the seasons of a woman's life, the researchers found that the female life cycle evolves through the same age-linked sequence of eras as does the male life cycle. These researchers concluded that the development of women and men is similar and different in certain fundamental respects and that there is great diversity in the lives of both genders. Men and women differ in "concrete life experiences" and the "timing of specific events" (p. 5). The developmental eras that Levinson et al. (1978, 1996) identified as being relevant to both women and men include: pre-adulthood (0-22 years); early adulthood (17-45 years); middle adulthood (40-65 years); and late adulthood (60 plus years). Throughout the lives of men and women periods of building and maintaining a life structure alternate with transitional periods promoting growth and development. However structure building-maintaining and transitional periods were found to function rather differently for women and men based on their different life circumstances, life courses, and ways of traversing developmental periods. Women were found to have different external and internal resources, reserves and restrictions with which to work on developmental tasks.

Specific to the late adult transition, while Levinson et al.'s (1978, 1996) studies spanned only the periods of early adult transition to middle adulthood, these theorists offered a “provisional” (p. 34) perspective on adulthood during the period from 60 to 85 years. They hypothesized that the necessary tasks for both women and men during this period include the completion of mid-life tasks and preparing for old age. The transition to this life stage was considered to be one of significant development and to represent “a major turning point in the life cycle” (p. 62). According to Levinson et al., beginning in one's early sixties there is a fundamental change in the character of living socially, psychologically and biologically. If the tasks of late adulthood are undertaken and completed, the era or “season” (p. 34) of late adulthood can be experienced as satisfactory, vital, and fulfilling. In this season of a man's or woman's life the body declines and the experience of illness, impairment, diminishing vitality, emotional disturbances and loss of family members, friends, and peers increases. The late adulthood transition affords the opportunity for men and women to learn to cope with the loss or diminishment of a variety of mid-adulthood capacities. According to Levinson, this can only be accomplished through the dismantling or modification of the previous life structure. He theorized that through the re-creation of youthfulness and vitality in age appropriate ways, individuals in late adulthood can begin to relinquish their control and reinvent relationships with their inner selves and with society in novel ways.

Finally, according to Levinson (1996), development for both sexes is “a process of evolution” (p. 20) that embodies both positive and negative growth—what Levinson refers to as “growing up” and “growing down” (p. 21). He coined the term *adolescing* to refer to growing up which suggests positive growth, and the term *senescing* or growing down, to refer to movement toward old age, negative growth and decay. Levinson postulated that the processes of *adolescing* and *senescing* occur throughout the human life cycle. Childhood is mostly a time of positive

growth and adolescence, while early and middle adulthood is a time when positive and negative growth, adolescence and senescence, exist together, albeit uneasily. In old age, although the process of senescence is ubiquitous, Levinson hypothesized that in seeking to achieve integrity, wisdom and meaning in life, and to come to terms with death, older adults may be doing some “vitally important adolescence” (p. 21). He suggested that older women and men may be compelled to reach their developmental potential by the certainty of approaching death.

Levinson’s (1978, 1996) research and theory regarding the life cycle and adult development is rooted in the work of Freud, Jung and Erikson. However, in his theory of adult development, Levinson conceptualizes adulthood more deeply and complexly than his predecessors. His theory is informed by both the nature of the individual and of society. Levinson’s theory is relevant for my study because his holistic picture of adult development is congruent with the concept of vitality and adaptive living predicated on an integration of one’s life. Levinson (1996) studied “and individual life in its complexity, at a given time” and delineated “its evolution over time” (p. 4). This seems particularly relevant to the understanding of how vitality and living well evolves through the life cycle, especially in old age. In examining the lives of both women and men Levinson et al. added important information to the literature in terms of the commonalities and differences inherent in female and male life cycles. On the basis of Levinson’s claims that the development of women and men is similar and different in certain fundamental respects and that there is great heterogeneity in the lives of both genders, it seems important to ensure that my sample includes an equal number of men and women to highlight potential gender differences in the experience of living vitally in later life.

I have some concerns and questions regarding Levinson’s developmental theory. One concern is that Levinson’s sample for both his study of men and, later, women were only aged 35 to 45 years and thus he could offer only a provisional perspective on later adulthood (60 to 85

years). There also appears to be a major flaw in Levinson's comparative study on gender which saw an 18 year gap between his study of men and his study of women. One would expect that the cultural expectations and lives of women would be very different from 1978 (Levinson's initial study of men) to 1996 (Levinson's study of women) because socially and culturally so many things happened (e.g., women's liberation movement, impact of the Vietnam War). It seems as if Levinson did not consider the social context of the historical era (late 1970s to mid to late 1990s) to be a very important factor. As well, the dynamics of the family changed considerably from the 1960s to the 1970s to the 1980s to the 1990s to now. Is it even possible to equate age 60 for males in 1978 to age 60 for females in 1996? Could women who were in their 60s and 70s in 1978 dismantle or modify their previous life structures? It seems that this was not at all typical for older women in that era. Levinson did not deconstruct the historical context as a factor influencing his findings. Finally, Levinson suggested that individuation throughout the life cycle was common to both men and women, something Gilligan (1986; 1993) and Caffarella and Olson (1993) argue is not the case.

Mary Baird Carlsen (1991), in her work *Creative Aging: A Meaning-Making Perspective*, added a further dimension to continued growth and development in late adulthood by linking the process of creativity to lifelong aging. Carlsen explores the creative potential of late adulthood which seems particularly relevant to my study and therefore worthy of review. Drawing upon her own work (research, observing in retirement homes/facilities, therapeutic work) and the research of others, Carlsen concluded that creativity is resource for healing and vitality that can be tapped into as one ages.

Through observation Carlsen (1991) found that the outer and the inner person may be somewhat at odds. She noted that, when individuals appearing to be in various stages of physical decline were introduced to new ideas, they became more engaged and livelier. They evidenced

curious and inquisitive attitudes and outlooks and appeared open to ideas and questions. Carlsen saw individuals who were mindful, a quality identified as necessary for creativity (Langer, 1989). Carlsen suggests that people are “creative meaning-makers” (p. 31) and that the first principle of creativity is that “this creativity of meaning-making is a handling and a manipulating of the varying crisis experiences that life can throw our way” (p. 31) and that from crisis we can grow and develop. She noted that a second principle of creativity is that our freedoms are born of our limits. In order to age creatively individuals must work with all the limitations, losses, disappointments, challenges life throws at them and continue to live meaningful and fulfilled and exciting lives. Carlsen summarized some findings from the 1988 presidential address to the American Psychological Society by Bonnie Strickland that linked creative living behaviours and states of minds and identified enhancing creative behaviours and attitudes. She highlights explanatory styles (optimism), hardiness (incorporates individual’s capacity for control, commitment and response to challenges), constructive thinking (information processing that involves integration of affective and intellectual states and moving beyond typical or stereotypical ways of responding to different and more constructive solutions) as necessary for creative and vital aging. Carlsen views mindfulness or what she describes as a combination of cognition and emotion while being alert and aware that leads to more flexible thinking, looking at things in new ways and having different perspectives, all of which lead to the enhancement of feelings of personal control as integral to creative and vital aging.

Carlsen summarizes some important qualities of creative, older individuals from the research of John A.B. McLeish including: having a sense of control over personal standards and moving forward until the end of life; being open to what life brings them and being open to and flexible about things that are more complex and difficult as well as simpler things; they respond rather than react, are curious and inquisitive by life and its happenings and can let go and go with

the flow spontaneously; and, they demonstrate dialectical thinking or the capacity to have and savour two contradictory ideas at the same time. Carlsen's constructivist approach to aging informs my research because it addresses the importance of creative aging and meaning-making as potentially a requirement for vital living.

In summary, the work of Erikson and Erikson (1997), Baltes (2003) and Baltes and Carstensen (2003), Carlsen (1991), Vaillant (2002) and Levinson (1978, 1996) informs my study by viewing late life development as adaptive—having growth potential—and requiring the achievement of specified tasks in order for older individuals to live successful and vital lives. The research and models proposed by these theorists focuses on the strengths rather than the deficits that older individuals possess. Drawing upon personal strengths and activating ways to maximize gains and minimize losses, may enable men and women in late adulthood to live well and vitally. This is relevant to my study and its underlying theoretical framework of positive psychology. The work of these theorists also informs my study by addressing how older adults make meaning of living vital and satisfying lives. Having looked at late adulthood, late adulthood tasks, the importance of meaning-making in late adulthood and major theories of adult development and aging, I now turn to the research and literature on successful aging, and late adulthood well-being and life-satisfaction.

Research on Successful Aging, Late Adulthood Well-Being and Life-Satisfaction

In this section, I will look at and synthesize pertinent research and literature that defines successful aging, and conceptualizes what predicts late adulthood well-being and life-satisfaction. Included in this review of the literature are quantitative studies (Bassett et al., 2007; Nygren et al., 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Takkinen & Ruoppila, 2001), qualitative studies (Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Stanford, 2006), mixed method studies

(Fry, 2000; Steverink et al., 2001), and pertinent reviews of the salient literature (Crowther et al., 2002; Depp & Jeste, 2006; Ranzijn, 2002; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001).

Rowe and Kahn (1987, 1997) founded the concept of successful aging based on a consolidation and analysis of data from the Longitudinal MacArthur Successful Aging Study—a study of 1,189 fairly high functioning women and men aged 70 to 79. Participants first participated in one intensive 90 minute interview between May, 1988 and December, 1989, then underwent a second interview between 1991 and 1992 for the purpose of determining the components involved in aging successfully. Rowe and Kahn conceptualized and differentiated between usual aging and successful aging. They defined usual aging as the normal losses or declines of aging, including minimal cognitive and physical losses, and still being actively involved in living. The researchers conceptualized the process of successful aging as involving minimal probability of disease and disability, high physical and cognitive capacity, and active involvement in life.

Contrary to the views long supported in the psychological and gerontological literature suggesting that later life is mostly a time of diminishing physical, psychological, and social functioning, Rowe and Kahn (1987, 1997) found, for the older adults in their study, declining health and functioning was not inevitable. The researchers noted the diversity in the ways their participants experienced the aging process, and identified the following factors as being necessary for aging well: absence of disease, disability, and risk factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, or smoking; maintaining mental and physical functioning; and being actively engaged in living, including having relationships with other people and being involved in productive activities.

The concept of successful aging as defined by Rowe and Kahn (1987, 1997) has been criticized in the literature (e.g., Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Friedan, 1993; Knight & Ricciardelli,

2003; Ryff, 1989b; Sullivan & Fisher, 1994; Vaillant, 2002; Wilhelmson et al., 2005) for being too limiting, too exclusive and too politically correct. This definition of successful aging has also been criticized based on its lack of attention to diversity among older adults. Although Rowe and Kahn noted the importance of the heterogeneity of the aging population in terms of the factors associated with successful aging, the notion of individual difference and diversity has generally not been well addressed in the literature on aging (Abraham & Hansson, 1995; Faber et al., 2001; Knight & Ricciardelli; Wilhelmson et al.).

Building on Rowe and Kahn's (1997) definition of successful aging, Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, and Koenig (2002) reviewed the literature on well-being and spirituality in later life and proposed an important addition to Rowe and Kahn's definition of successful aging – positive spirituality. Positive spirituality “involves a developing and internalized personal relation with the sacred or transcendent that is not bound by race, ethnicity, economics, or class and promotes the wellness and welfare of self and others” (p. 614). Positive spirituality draws upon qualities of both spirituality and religion. Crowther et al. investigated the relationship between psychological and physical health and positive spirituality to determine if there was a link between positive spirituality and health, and if the combination of positive spirituality and health had an impact on aging well. In their review of the literature on well-being and spirituality, Crowther et al. found that positive spirituality appears to predict improvement in subjective well-being (e.g., Ellison, 1991), reduce levels of depression and distress (e.g., Williams, Larson, Buckler, Heckmann & Pyle, 1991), and be related to a decrease in morbidity and increase in longevity for older adults (e.g., Levin, 1996). Positive spirituality may well be an important dimension of vital living for some if not all of the participants in my proposed study.

I now turn to the work of Vaillant and Mukamal (2001) who examined the concept of successful aging by reviewing the literature on health in old age. In their two-part review of

successful aging, these researchers focused attention on the intertwined tri-dimensional aspect of their conceptualization of successful aging which includes change, development or maturation as well as decline. In the first of their two-part review these authors examined selected findings of the last 15 years which looked at the mental and physical health of older adults including findings from The Berlin Aging Study (Baltes & Mayer, 1999) and the MacArthur Study of Aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). From these in-depth reviews, Vaillant and Mukamal found that living longer resulted in fewer years of disablement rather than more. As well, they found that although older adults may have been regarded by their physicians as “chronically ill” (p. 840) and been taking numerous medications, two out of three of the adults in these studies did not view themselves as ill. Based on their review of the literature on successful aging Vaillant and Mukamal concluded that if individuals reach the age of 75 years, aging successfully generally appears to surmount social class effects. Vaillant and Mukamal noted that between the ages of 70 and 95 there was a noticeable shift in the ways in which the participants in these studies coped. Similar to Crowther et al. (2002), serenity (faith, acceptance and interdependence) and spirituality appeared to help these older adults cope with the challenges of aging. A reliance on humour and the ability to view themselves as better off than others who were more disabled were also related to more effective coping. Vaillant and Mukamal also identified having a post secondary education (appearing to reflect attributes of being able to be planful and practice self-care) and a close family structure (relationship connection) as the major psychosocial predictors of aging well for the participants in these studies.

Vaillant and Mukamal’s (2001) heuristic model of successful aging was founded on findings from the Longitudinal Study of Adult Development at Harvard University (reviewed under major theories of adult development and aging). The study prospectively followed two socially heterogeneous cohorts of male adolescents—a college cohort and an inner city cohort—

until the participants became great-grandfathers. All participants were male, born in the United States, and Caucasian. To define successful aging or well-being in old age, Vaillant and Mukamal selected six domains or areas of function consisting of physician-assessed objective physical health and absence of irreversible physical disability, subjective physical health, length of active life, objective mental health, subjective life satisfaction, and social supports. By using these domains, the authors were able to classify older people along a continuum, one end being happy-well, the other end being sad-sick. Individuals who performed well in all six domains until age 80 were considered to be happy-well; those who were physically disabled and psychologically and socially unhappy were considered to be sad-sick. Based on their research on successful aging, Vaillant and Mukamal identified seven protective factors that individuals have at least some level of control over. Having an adaptive coping style (utilization of mature defenses, e.g., sublimation, humor, altruism, suppression), at least one close relationship, and a post secondary education were protective factors similar to what the authors found in their review of the pertinent literature. However, they also identified never having smoked or having stopped at a young age, no alcohol abuse, a healthy weight, and some exercise as controllable protective factors for aging well.

Another review of the literature on successful aging was undertaken by Depp and Jeste (2006). These researchers reviewed 28 large English-language quantitative studies of individuals over 60 years of age to find definitions and identify predictors of successful aging. The majority of the studies included in this review included large samples of older adults living in the community. Based on their review of the various definitions of successful aging used in these studies, Depp and Jeste concluded that aging well could be defined as the absence of physical and cognitive disability or impairment along with social and productive functioning and life-satisfaction/well-being. They identified a number of significant factors that were correlated with

successful aging including age (being young-old), not smoking, absence of physical disability, and absence of arthritis and diabetes. More exercise/physical activity, more social contacts, better self-rated health, absence of cognitive impairments and depression, and fewer medical issues/problems were found to be moderate predictors of successful aging. Surprisingly, and in contrast to some other studies (e.g., Steverink et al., 2001; Vaillant, 2002), in their literature review Depp and Jeste found that education level, marital status, gender and socioeconomic status were generally not related to successful aging for the participants in these studies.

In the various studies reviewed by Depp and Jeste (2006) the range of participants considered to be aging successfully was broad—from 0.4%-95%. Across the literature the mean ratio of participants considered to be aging successfully was found to be 35.8% (SD: 19.8). This suggests that approximately one-third of the participants in these studies were considered to be living well, despite the challenges of the aging process. However, this also suggests that approximately two-thirds of older adults in these studies were not coping well with aging. As the population of adults 65 and older swells in the coming years, it seems all the more urgent that researchers like myself focus our attention on learning more about how older adults create and maintain vital and satisfying lives.

I now turn from strictly quantitative studies to a quantitative and qualitative study that adds to the literature on living well in later life—Steverink, Westerhof, Bode and Dittmann-Kohli's (2001) investigation into the relationships between personal experience of aging, individual resources (physical and material, social and psychological), and the subjective well-being of 4,034 individuals in Germany (51.2% men and 48.8% women) aged 40 to 85 years. The following three hypotheses guided their investigation: (1) the personal experience of aging is multidimensional and multidirectional; (2) having a deeper store or a higher level of resources is related to feeling more positive about growing older; (3) feeling more positive about the aging

process aids people in making good decisions resulting in experiences of greater subjective well-being. Data was gathered by means of personal interviews and questionnaires. Variables included the personal aging experience, physical and material resources, social resources, psychological resources and subjective well-being.

With regard to the personal experience of aging, Steverink et al. (2001) found it to be a multidimensional phenomenon including: physical loss (e.g., health and vitality); constant growth and personal development; and social losses (e.g., not being needed, decreased respect from others). The researchers also found the experience of aging to be multidirectional, characterized by both positive (growth) and negative experiences (loss and decline). Steverink et al. found that younger age, better subjective health, higher socioeconomics, less social isolation, higher educational level, and having hope contributed to participants experiencing the aging process as a time of growth rather than physical and social decline. For the participants in their study, the above resources had a stronger impact on personal aging than actual age. The researchers found that participants who were married tended not to experience aging as a social loss, having or not having a spouse was not related to physical decline or continuous growth.

Based on their findings, Steverink et al. (2001) concluded that subjective well-being or the positive experience of aging consists of a number of different dimensions including personal, social and physical domains and includes both positive and negative experiences. These authors suggested that personal experiences of aging for the participants in their study is related to how happy individuals are in terms of positive and negative affect.

In another of the few mixed-methods studies examining the quality of life of older adults Fry (2000) gleaned a more in-depth picture of older adults' needs for "human agency, mastery, and control" (p. 364) in order to age well and have a good quality of life. In her quantitative and qualitative study of 331 men and women over the age of 58 years, living in Vancouver and

Victoria, B.C., Fry examined participants' views of what constitutes a satisfactory quality of life. Data were obtained from participants by means of responses to a questionnaire in which they were asked to report their priorities and concerns about their quality of life in the present and for the future. Data were also obtained from in-depth interviews with 37 older adults, purposively selected from the larger cohort of 331.

Fry (2000) found that the emergent themes from the in-depth interviews corresponded to the themes identified in the factor analysis of the data from the questionnaire. One of the most striking findings was that the majority of participants reported needing empowerment in their lives, including autonomy, control and independence in decision making to pursue their desired life-style including control with regard to end-of-life physician-assisted suicide. According to Fry, the participants reported feeling empowered when they: had their achievements and contributions to society acknowledged; were challenged and had opportunities for stimulating activities and experiences; were treated with dignity and respect by younger generations; felt appreciated and remembered by significant others in their lives; and felt free to express their fears and worries about what their quality of life would look like in the future. The right to privacy was also found to be important to quality of life and psychological well-being for the participants in Fry's study.

Fry's (2000) study is relevant to my research because it explores how living well in late adulthood is connected to older individual's belief systems, values, hopes, dreams, expectations, concerns, fears and reassurances that their voices will be heard and attended to. It takes into account the subjective experiences of the experts on aging—older adults.

I now look at a study by Taakinen and Ruoppila (2001) that makes explicit the importance of meaning-making as a component of adaptive functioning in old age. According to Frankl (1963), "a will to meaning" is a universal human attribute. Seeking meaning in life is

relevant to my study because according to some of the literature on aging (e.g., Battista & Almond, 1973; Langle, 2001) the search for meaning appears to be especially important in late adulthood. Theorists and researchers on aging including Baltes (2003), Baltes and Carstensen (2003), Erikson and Erikson (1997), Erikson et al. (1986), Friedan (1993), Langle (2001), Levinson (1978, 1996), and Vaillant (2002) posit that as older adults are faced with the many challenges and losses inherent in the aging process, they are compelled to reflect on the meaning of the lives they have lived and what is in store for them in the future. Takkinen and Ruoppila (2001) analyzed findings from the *Evergreen Project*, a longitudinal, multidisciplinary study of Finnish men and women born in 1910 (N = 285) and 1914 (N = 382). Their goal was to examine the relationship between meaning-making and well-being in later adulthood. Participants were interviewed and underwent medical examinations. In 1997 selected participants (N = 78) from both cohorts underwent an intensive interview and 55 participants (37 women and 18 men) were included in this study. The authors conducted an interview, had participants respond to a questionnaire and measured meaning in life through the application of the life-line drawing.

Overall, Takkinen and Ruoppila (2001) identified that for the participants in their study meaning in life was: important to subjective well-being; could be sustained even in the midst of objective changes such as losses and gains in functioning; and was related to life satisfaction, an absence or decrease in depression, and diminished feelings of loneliness.

I now turn to Ranzijn's (2002) review of the literature which reveals a number of ways in which the field of positive psychology is well positioned to illuminate the potential of older individuals and help them to realize their potential. In his paper, *Towards a Positive Psychology of Ageing: Potentials and Barriers*, Ranzijn pointed out the need for the development of a positive psychology of aging and cited a growing body of literature that relates relevant attitudes and dispositional qualities to psychological and physical well-being in individuals in late

adulthood (e.g., Benyamini et al., 2000; Levy et al., 2000; Vaillant, 2000). The field of psychogerontology abounds with conflicting views regarding the abilities and potentials of older adults (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 1996; Hultsch et al., 1999; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Based on his review of the literature, Ranzijn (2002) suggested that overall, older persons have greater life satisfaction relative to the younger generations. He identified the following ways in which life satisfaction might be understood by older adults: increased freedom from family, work and financial responsibilities; ever-growing memories, life experiences, and abilities; and a greater appreciation for and understanding of the profoundness and fragility of human existence. According to some proponents of positive psychology (e.g., Dittman-Kohli, 1990; Ikels et al., 1992; Van Tilburg, 1998) these are the building blocks for what Vaillant (2002) refers to as ‘Keeper of the Meaning’ or conscientious citizens and wise conservationists or wise and just older adults.

In his review of the literature on the potentials of, and barriers to, aging positively Ranzijn (2002) noted how many older people, while physically frail, are engaged passionately with family and community life (Ranzijn & Grbich, 2001). He noted how older adults are survivors who have lived long lives and overcome many challenges, due to their ability to adapt to change (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 1996; George & Clipp, 1991; Rapkin & Fischer, 1992; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In contrast to prevalent views of older adults as being dependent and frail, on the basis of his review of the literature Ranzijn suggested that many older individuals are “the mainstays of their communities and are supporting younger generations rather than needing to be supported” (p. 83). In his review of the literature, Ranzijn also found strong support for an increased capacity for regulation of emotions in older adults (Strongman & Overton, 1999) which appears to help people in late adulthood become more content and accepting of life.

Adding to the work done by Takkinen and Ruoppila (2001) on meaning in life as an important component of aging well, Nygren, Alex, Jonsen, Gustafson, Norberg and Lundman (2005) focused on the following four concepts related to aging well—resilience (personal strength aiding in overcoming adversity), sense of coherence (positive way of viewing the world and one's life), purpose in life (finding meaning in life), and self-transcendence (opening up inwardly, outwardly and temporally). These concepts embody the ways in which individuals, in this case individuals aged 85+, were able to manage adversity and maintain physical and mental health and strength. In their study which was part of the Umea 85+ study, Nygren et al. looked at the relationship between these four factors and the perceived physical and mental health in 125 Swedish men and women aged 85 years or older. Each participant ranked themselves on the Resilience, Sense of Coherence, Self-Transcendence and Purpose in Life scales as well as responding to a Health Survey questionnaire.

Overall, Nygren et al. (2005) found that later life participants who were living and coping well showed either greater or the same levels of purpose in life, resilience, sense of coherence and self-transcendence as did their younger-aged cohort. The authors also found that all four phenomena were interconnected and related to inner strength. This led them to suggest that interventions could be created for the elderly, including individuals aged 85+, to improve overall mental and physical health and to increase coping skills. Contrary to much of the literature on aging Nygren et al.'s findings indicate that advanced age is not always correlated with increased fragility and decline. Rather, some individuals in later adulthood appear to be imbued with or have the potential to enhance qualities of resilience, coherence, purpose in life and self-transcendence which, according to the researchers, are qualities of inner strength. Nygren et al.'s findings provide a positive perspective on psychological and physical health in later life.

I now look at a quantitative study by Ryff and Keyes (1995) that tested a theoretical model of psychological well-being which incorporated six dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance) and examined “the replicative consistency of age and sex differences on the various indicators of well-being” and compared “the relationships between the theory-based dimensions of well-being and three prominent indicators from prior research (i.e., happiness, life satisfaction, depression)” (p. 720). The authors used empirical data from a nationally representative sample of 1,108 adults, 25 years old and older, with an average age of 45.6 years. 59% of the participants were female. Respondents were divided into three age groups to facilitate analyses. Young adults (n = 133) were 25 to 29 years old. Midlife adults (n = 805) were aged 30 to 64. Older adults (n = 160) were 65 and older. Each adult was interviewed by telephone for approximately 30 minutes.

The authors found that confirmatory factor analyses with the data supported the six dimensional model, with a single higher order factor as being a better fit over other alternatives including a single-factor model. As well, Ryff and Keyes (1995) found that the data supported the replicative consistency of both sex and age differences regarding the six dimensions of psychological well-being. On the dimensions of Purpose in Life (believing one’s life is purposeful and meaningful) and Personal Growth (continuing to grow and develop as a person), the respondents who were 65 years old and older scored significantly lower than did the younger age groups. With regard to Environmental Mastery (managing one’s life and world) both of the older age groups scored significantly higher than the youngest age group. There were no age differences noted on the dimensions of Self-Acceptance (viewing oneself and one’s past positively) and Autonomy (feeling a sense of self-determination). The oldest age group scored higher than both of the younger age groups on the dimension of Positive Relations With Others.

Ryff and Keyes also found a moderate to strong association between the dimensions of Self-Acceptance and Environmental Mastery and scales of happiness, life satisfaction, and depression. They noted that the other four dimensions of psychological well-being showed weaker associations with the scales of happiness, life satisfaction and depression.

I now turn from looking at quantitative research studies and literature to an in-depth qualitative study by Knight and Ricciardelli (2003) in which the researchers asked the experts themselves—adults aged 70 to 101 years of age—for their personal perceptions of successful aging and what they viewed as being essential criteria for aging well. Sixty urban Australian participants (42 women and 18 men) between the ages of 70 and 101 years (mean age = 80.05 years) living in their homes alone (18.33%) or with a spouse (33.33%) or in retirement communities (26.67%) or in residential care facilities (21.67%) were studied. None of the participants had dementia. Physical abilities ranged from total independence to almost complete physical dependence. Participants were interviewed individually for one to two hours and were asked what they believed successful aging included. Through in-depth content analysis of the transcripts two of the most frequently occurring themes identified in the majority of previous literature on successful aging (e.g., Havighurst, 1961; Maddox, 1968; Morgan et al., 1991; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997), health and activity, were identified by Knight and Ricciardelli (2003). Six other themes emerged from the data as being essential for successful aging: personal growth; happiness; close personal relationships; independence; appreciation for life; and having lived a long life. These themes have also been noted in the literature by other theorists and researchers as being relevant to successful aging (e.g., Meeks & Murrell, 2001; Ryff, 1989a). Generally, the older adults in this study stated that they had accepted their aging and were happy being the age they were. As well, they appeared to have a sense of purpose in life and considered it important to be physically, socially and mentally active to the best of their abilities.

I now turn to Stanford's (2006) phenomenological study on thriving in late and later adulthood. In her study Stanford examined how 13 women (aged 75-91) thrived in late and later adulthood. Thriving was defined as "doing well and being happy" (p. 885) in late life. After analyzing data from multiple interviews, projective inventories and focus groups, Stanford identified the following six common themes expressed by these older women who self-defined as thriving: vital engagement and service; life-long learning; appreciation of fundamental life factors including family, friends, health, and a secure financial situation; valuing responsibility and honesty; maintaining a positive attitude; and reliance on faith/spirituality. When reflecting on why they saw themselves as thriving, the participants attributed their ability to thrive in later life to childhood or present life experiences. These women intentionally sought to thrive and believed that facing and dealing with life's challenges encourages thriving. A surprising finding that emerged from Stanford's study was the large number of life-long challenges (personal and health related), traumas, and losses in the participants' lives. These aging women were found to be very resilient and appeared to use challenges and traumas to transform their lives, supporting Frankl's (1984) hypothesis that finding meaning in unbearable situations can aid individuals to overcome adversity. This finding regarding older women's ability to overcome major life challenges lends support to Vaillant's (2002) proposal that positive aging reflects positive reaction to the challenges and losses inherent in adult development.

I turn now to a recent Canadian study by Bassett, Bourbonnais and McDowell (2007) focused on how and why some older adults manage to live long and keep well by remaining active and engaged in late and "late" late adulthood. Bassett et al. reported findings from the third wave of the Canadian Longitudinal Study of Health and Aging (CSHA). The authors analyzed responses made by 2,783 healthy Canadian respondents aged 75 to 104 years to the question: "What do you think makes people live long and keep well?" (p. 115). In response to

this question Bassett et al. uncovered 24 separate themes that they grouped into three major categories: personal factors (e.g., positive attitude, autonomy, sense of self, etc.); relationships with others (quality and quantity of relationships); and system influences (e.g., financial resources and support from social services).

Overall, Bassett et al. (2007) concluded that Canadian older adults, even as they are faced with decline and loss, “make sense of their lives as active, moral, cognitively and socially engaged individuals” (p. 123) and are informed consumers with regard to aging. According to the researchers, older adults take a majority of responsibility for their longevity and well-being including being responsible for personal qualities of attitude, determination and motivation, while also viewing themselves as being connected within relationships. The participants in Bassett et al.’s study appeared to lead purposeful lifestyles and work consciously to build social support and financial security—factors that they felt helped account for successful aging.

Bassett et al.’s (2007) study seems especially informative to my study because of the researchers’ focus on the factors older adults feel are important contributors to successful aging in later life. In their study Bassett et al. did what researchers on successful aging rarely do, they summarized older Canadian adults’ experiences and perceptions of aging well in their own words. In my study I also intend to include the voices of my late adulthood participants.

With regard to the studies on successful aging, late adulthood well-being, and life-satisfaction, there appears to be sample bias which may mean that the findings are not representative of all older adults who are aging well. These studies do not include a representative sample of later life adults who have financial or diversity challenges. For example, do individuals who have no families and are poor fair as well as those who have adequate finances and close family relationships? Are they living vital lives? Generally the elderly, especially older women, are among society’s poorest members.

In summary, in this review of the relevant literature on aging successfully, most theorists and researchers conceptualize the capacity to age well as multi-directional (encompassing loss and growth) and multi-dimensional (encompassing psychological, personal, physical, and social domains). While Rowe and Kahn (1987, 1997) conceptualized high physical capacity and minimal probability of disease and disability as being necessary for aging successfully, other theorists and researchers (e.g., Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Depp & Jeste, 2006; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Ranzijn, 2002; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2002) disagree. These theorists and researchers view aging successfully as being as diverse and unique to each individual as is the heterogeneous late adulthood population, however, their samples are not necessarily inclusive of the older adult population. Finally, it is evident upon reviewing the literature on successful aging that the use of selective optimization with compensation (Baltes, 1990) may be important with respect to vital, active and meaningful aging (Bassett et al., 2007; Knight & Ricciardelli; Nygren et al., 2005; Ranzijn). Having reviewed the relevant literature on successful aging, late adulthood well-being and life satisfaction, I now turn to the research and literature on vitality and late adulthood.

Research on Vitality and Late Adulthood

In this section I critique the research and literature on vitality. Specifically I look at and crystallize the small amount of work on vitality and late living adults. Included in this review of the literature is a conceptualization of subjective vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) and a synthesis of the research and literature on vitality and older adults (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1986; Kasser & Ryan, 1999; Minicuci, Mazari, Maggi, Noale, Senesi, & Crepaldi, 2005; Murrell, Salsman, & Meeks, 2003; Penninx, Guralnik, Simonsick, Kasper, Ferrucci, & Fried, 1998).

Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986) in their work *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, added another dimension to the phenomenon of vitality by concentrating on how vitality is achieved in old age through development and growth. Because it uses psychosocial development to focus on vitality and engagement and older adults, Erikson et al.'s work seems especially relevant to my study and therefore is worthy of review. In 1981, Erikson and colleagues conducted two open-ended interviews with 29 surviving parents of children who were subjects of the longitudinal Berkeley Guidance Study. Participants range in age from 75 to 95 years. Interview questions addressed later life and early life experiences. For over half a century, life-historical information had been gathered on these individuals and their children. They were interviewed initially in 1928, then in 1945 or 1946 and 1968.

Overall, Erikson and colleagues (1986) found that vitality emerged from the strengths (e.g., hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom) that are developed throughout every life stage. Vitality and vital engagement in late adulthood for the participants in this study appeared to be generated by older adults' challenging themselves to consolidate their whole lives by balancing each psychosocial theme to the extent possible given their life circumstances. Erikson et al. concluded that it is through this effort and challenge that growth occurs in later life, resulting in an integrated identity and heightened awareness of self, family, community and the world. Through this process, a lifelong sense of effectiveness, a critical resource in late life, is revalued and hope is regenerated. Adaptation to, and gracious acceptance of, new limits on activity were also found to be important to vital living for the participants in this study. Based on these findings Erikson and colleagues proposed that when older adults know that they are valued, needed and wanted, they are inclined to possess more vitality, energy, and capacity to care for both themselves and others. They found that the family is often not only an important source of caring for older adults, but also a major source of vitality. Erikson et al.'s

work informs my work because it addresses the importance of adaptive lifespan development as a potential prerequisite for vitally engaged living for old and older adults. It is possible, even likely, that the older vital living individuals in my study will not only have mastered previous developmental tasks and be in the process of achieving or having achieved late and later life developmental tasks, but will also derive their sense of vitality from knowing that they are valued by their families and society.

I now turn to the work of Ryan and Frederick (1997) for an overall view and understanding of subjective vitality. In a series of six studies, these researchers examined the phenomenon of subjective vitality, defined as a conscious “positive feeling of aliveness and energy” (p. 529). In their studies of vitality, Ryan and Frederick hypothesized that subjective vitality was a dynamic reflection of both biological and psychological well-being and assumed that both somatic and psychological components would influence subjective vitality. Generally the sample population for these studies consisted of male and female college/university students. In the six studies the researchers looked at the following: (1) the relationship between subjective vitality and psychological states and factors related to physical health and efficaciousness; (2) different indexes of physical health and well-being; (3) the relationship between subjective vitality and the Big Five personality traits; (4) the correlation between experiences of pain and lower levels of subjective vitality; (5) the relationship between somatic factors and treatment-related motivations and subjective vitality; and (6) the influence of common physical symptoms on subjective vitality.

Overall, the findings from Ryan and Frederick’s (1997) research support the hypothesis that subjective vitality is related to elements that support growth and agency. Specifically, subjective vitality was shown to be positively related to self-actualization, self-esteem, mental health, and self-determination. Less vitality was related to indexes of intrapsychic distress. When

individuals felt more vitality, they were more motivated. However, when they felt that external factors were controlling them, they felt less vitality. In conclusion, psychological and physical well-being appeared to be associated with feelings of subjective vitality.

Although the participants involved in Ryan and Frederick's (1997) research on subjective vitality were college/university students and thus, not representative of older adults with regard to age, findings from this research inform my study in a number of important ways. Ryan and Frederick's definition of subjective vitality will be used to guide this inquiry.

Building on Ryan and Frederick's previous studies, Kasser and Ryan's (1999) study looked specifically at older adults residing in a nursing home for the purpose of examining the relationship between perceived autonomy, relatedness, lower distress, higher well-being, and subjective vitality. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which autonomy and relatedness affected the well-being and health of residents in this nursing home. Kasser and Ryan hypothesized that health and well-being would be supported by higher personal autonomy, perceived support for autonomy from the nursing home community and friends and family, as well as quality rather than quantity of perceived emotional support. One, or if needed two interviews were conducted with 50 female and male residents aged 70 to 99 years. As well, the participants completed survey items. The length of time the participants had spent living in the nursing home ranged from half a month to 99 months. Measures of autonomy, relatedness, and outcome were administered.

Overall, Kasser and Ryan (1999) found that vitality, life satisfaction, greater well-being, and fewer depressive symptoms were associated with the participants' perceptions of being supported to be autonomous by family, friends and the nursing home staff. There appeared to be a relationship between vitality and both having choices and social relationships. In addition, participants who chose to come to the nursing home of their own free will (autonomously

motivated), and felt that they were more in control of their daily life, described themselves as having more vitality. Kasser and Ryan also found that vitality appears to be “a central marker of organismic well-being” (p. 949). In these researchers’ study, participants’ subjective vitality varied based on psychological health, life satisfaction, subjective physical health, depression, and anxiety.

My study may potentially be informed by Kasser and Ryan’s (1999) work because of their focus on the predictors of subjective vitality in an older and more vulnerable population. Numerous studies have been conducted on what the requirements for physical health care should be for late and later life adults; however, the requirements for positive psychological care in this population has not been studied to the same degree.

Penninx, Guralnik, Simonsick, Kasper, Ferrucci, and Fried’s (1998) examination of emotional vitality among disabled older women examines the relationship between positive psychological states and vitality and also addresses an important issue missing from the previously reviewed literature—whether or not individuals who are experiencing chronic illness and/or physical disability are able to sustain emotional vitality. Penninx et al. examined the relationship between chronic illness/physical disability and emotional vitality for 1002 community living, moderately to severely disabled but cognitively intact older women living in the Baltimore city area who had participated in Women’s Health and Aging Study (WHAS). For the purpose of this study, emotional vitality was defined as “having a high sense of personal mastery, being happy, and having low depressive symptomatology and anxiety” (Penninx et al., p. 1). In-depth interviews and physical examinations were conducted to gather information on participants’ levels of emotional vitality, demographics, health status, and social context.

Overall, Penninx et al. (1998) found that 35% of the participants in their study were emotionally vital. They found that emotional vitality for these women appeared to be influenced

not only by intrinsic personality characteristics, but also by an interaction of demographic, health status, and social contexts. Good cognitive status and eyesight were also indicative of emotional vitality for the participants in the study. Emotionally vital individuals tended to be at the younger spectrum of late adulthood, suggesting that a diminishing sense of personal mastery or control and happiness occurred with increasing age. With regard to aspects of the social environment and their relationship to emotional vitality, the authors found that it was the perceived adequacy of their social support that facilitated emotional vitality for these women. Warmth and understanding from friends, relatives, and caretakers was more important than the number of social contacts and the intimacy of the relationships. Penninx et al.'s findings on the experiences of disabled older women are relevant for my study because older adults tend to be more at risk than younger generations of physical limitations, and/or chronic physical health problems and disease. It is possible that the older participants in my study will be experiencing a range of physical limitations and chronic health conditions and still self-define as vitally engaged in living.

I now turn to the findings of a study by Murrell, Salsman and Meeks (2003), which builds on the research of Penninx et al. (1998). Murrell et al. examined the impact of positive psychological states and desirable events, self-esteem, and social support on health and vitality in later life. They found lower levels of depressive symptoms correlated positively with greater vitality for older adults. They noted that having a higher educational level predicted both fewer depressive symptoms and greater vitality for their participants. In this study the researchers hypothesized that more years of education would be positively related to vitality and negatively related to health symptomatology, and that positive psychological states would mediate the relationship between vitality and years of education for the elderly participants in the study. Data were analyzed from a prospective study with a sample of 1,277 female and male participants 65

years and older living in nonurban areas in Kentucky. Four interviews were conducted over six month intervals from 1982 to 1984. Demographic and educational information was collected, and the participants completed the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, the General Well-Being Schedule, the Louisville Older Persons Event Scale; and, the Health Symptoms Questionnaire. Overall, Murrell et al. found that a higher level of education is a lifelong resource that potentially led to more positive psychological states such as enduring happiness and contentment which in turn were related to vitality and health in late life for the participants in this study. These positive psychological states appear to neutralize the effects of negative states, implying that, generally, positive states are positively correlated to psychological and physical health in older adults even in the face of significant challenges and losses.

This work is particularly salient to my study because the findings that emerge from it highlight the potential importance of positive emotions to psychological and physical health for the participants in the study.

Minicuci, Marzari, Maggi, Noale, Senesi and Crepaldi's (2005) research lend support to Murrell et al.'s (2003) findings in terms of the relationship between higher educational level, lower levels of depressive symptoms and greater vitality for older adults as well as the relationship between positive psychological states and vitality. In their longitudinal study on aging, Minicuci and his colleagues examined data from the Italian Longitudinal Study on Aging to analyze the concept of vitality and identify associated factors or predictors of vitality in older men and women for the purpose of using this information to devise systematic interventions. The Italian Longitudinal Study on Aging included 5632 female and male community dwelling and institutionalized individuals aged 65 to 84 years of age. Information had been collected over two phases. In phase one, all participants were interviewed and examined by a nurse and a physician. Measures used included the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE), tests of memory and

depression, diagnostic tests, and Activities of Daily Living (ADLs). During the second phase, participants who were suspected of having health and neurological problems were seen by specialists and their medical records were reviewed. Their problems were clinically confirmed. Baseline data were collected in 1992 and 1993, with a follow up data collection in 1996 and 1997. Participants were assessed on their mental status, depressive symptomatology, physical functioning and performance, and diagnosed health conditions. In this study, the determination of vitality was based both on both cognitive (no cognitive impairment) and physical (independent on all ADLs) functioning. Those identified as being in the high vitality group scored in the 75th percentile or higher on the MMSE. Those in the low vitality group scored in the 25th percentile or lower on the MMSE and were considered to be moderately or severely disabled.

Overall, individuals possessing a high level of vitality were found by Minicuci et al. (2005) to be physically independent and showed no cognitive impairment. Vitality in these older adults was related to a strong interaction between physical and cognitive tasks. A higher educational level was found to be most strongly correlated with greater vitality for these older adults. In an attempt to explain this relationship Minicuci et al. hypothesized that the individuals with higher levels of education also tended to have higher incomes. This factor might have resulted in less stress, a better social environment, and more positive psychological consequences. As well, the authors hypothesized that healthier lifestyle factors and more access to preventative health services were more typically found among more well-educated people in their studies.

Some other predictors of vitality in later life that were revealed in this study by Minicuci et al. (2005) included being “young” old; male, having had a white collar/professional job, being a normal weight, not having had a stroke, and a lack of impairment. These researchers found

that, in their study, depression was negatively correlated with vitality. In their study older adults in the high vitality group had a significantly lower rate of depressive symptoms than did participants in the low and moderate vitality groups. Minicuci et al.'s findings suggest that in order for a vital late life to be generated, lifelong learning, active mental exercise and social engagement need to occur. As well, they found that proper nutrition is an essential factor in promoting general cognitive and physical vitality. Minicuci et al.'s findings suggested that personal habits and social factors are important components for determining healthy physical and mental functioning in older adults. By analyzing the phenomenon of vitality and identifying a number of related factors in a large sample of older women and men, Minicuci et al. have provided a more complete picture of vital aging in later life.

In summary, a review of the literature on vitality and aging has illuminated a paucity of research in this area. Ryan and Frederick's (1997) work on subjective vitality was focused on young adults. It remains to be determined the extent to which their finding that subjective vitality, overall, was a dynamic reflection of organismic and psychological well-being applies to adults in later life. Both Kasser and Ryan (1999) and Minicuci et al. (2005) studied older adults and found that perceived autonomy in the elderly led to higher vitality, well-being, and life-satisfaction as well as fewer depressive symptoms. Minicuci et al. and Murrell et al. (2003) identified a relationship between a higher level of education and vitality. According to Erikson and colleagues (1986), in order for older adults to live vitally, it is necessary for them to integrate all the previous psychosocial life stages in relation to their present development. Finally, the work of Penninx et al. (1998) revealed that a significant number of older disabled women in their study were able to maintain a high level of emotional vitality based on a combination of personality and disposition factors and demographic variables.

In conclusion this literature review informs my study in a number of important ways. It is evident that there is a large body of literature that has dealt with the importance of quality of life among older adults. However, to date few qualitative studies have asked older adults what aging well and vitally looks like and means to them from their point of view. Only a small body of qualitative literature has asked older adults about their experiences of successful and vital aging (e.g., Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Stanford, 2006). In-depth, holistic narratives of older individuals' experiences of vital living appear to be missing from the literature on aging. Most of the literature on aging has focused on deficits rather than strengths. Only a small number of researchers and theorists have approached aging from a positive psychology theoretical framework (e.g., Mukamal & Vaillant, 2001; Nygren et al., 2005; Ranzijn, 2002). Focusing on strengths versus deficits seems an important direction for those interested in supporting and enhancing the quality of life for adults in late, and later life. Although there are a number of major developmental models of lifespan development, most have extrapolated their conclusions about later life development on the basis of data collected from often relatively homogeneous samples of young and middle-aged adults (e.g., Erikson, 1982; Levinson, 1978, 1996). As is evident from the literature review the concept of subjective vitality has mainly been studied using college-aged participants. There is a paucity of research in the fields of counselling and developmental psychology about what makes a life vital and worth living in late and later adulthood. As a result, we lack knowledge of appropriate interventions and strategies for enhancing well-being and vitality for adults in later life.

To date there is a very limited amount of literature on aging that addresses what Friedan (1993) suggested are possibilities for reinventing older adults' lives. Such possibilities include loving in new ways, reaching greater depths of intimacy, continuing learning and understanding, finding meaningful work and activities, and becoming involved on a global level. My review of

the research and literature on late and later adulthood has shown that it is both timely and important to examine how men and women over 70 construct vital lives—lives full of possibility. A narrative approach to the study of vital living among older adults will evoke the participants' individual experiences and provide rich content and details of living a vital life and construct shared experiences or common themes of what it looks like and means to live vitally in a person's eighth and ninth decades.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Approach to the Question

In this study, I explored how older adults narrated and understood their experiences of being vitally engaged in living. To reiterate, the question guiding this study was: **How do men and women, seventy years of age and older, narrate and understand their experiences of being vitally engaged in living?**

Narrative inquiry is based in the study of experience and is founded on studying individuals in-depth, focusing on the whole both in context and in time. This is accomplished by means of the stories participants tell of their experiences (Bruner, 1990; Josselson, Lieblich & McAdams, 2003; Riessman, 1993). An important goal of the narrative method is to gather thick, rich, in-depth, multilayered data on phenomena being studied (Josselson et al.; Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Josselson et al. describe narrative research as “up close and personal” (p. 4) underscoring the value it puts on the individual’s communication of his or her experience or story.

According to Riessman (1993), narrative research explores both the telling of experiences and how participants understand their experiences—how they make meaning of their experiences. Human beings are able to make meaning or sense of their experiences by telling them as stories. Narratives are “storied ways of knowing and communicating” (Riessman, in Jupp, 2006, p.186). The focus in narrative research and analysis is on oral narratives of subjective experience. Michael Murray (2003) contends that narrative concerns itself with how individuals make sense of their continually changing world and how, through this process of making sense or understanding, they can begin to define themselves or to construct and understand their identities. In other words, personal narratives become people’s identities both in content and form. We know and reveal ourselves by the stories we tell (Bruner, 1991, 1996;

Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Lieblich, Randall & Mc Kim, 2008; Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1991; Riessman). Through narrative research inquiry, individual truths and realities are constructed via the creation and telling of personal narratives and stories. By understanding the meaning of participants' narratives and stories, the researcher can better and more fully understand human behavior and individual experience, but also experience at the macro (societal) level of culture. Individual narratives show us how culture works through dominant discourse. In this study, each participant's unique experience will be documented and 'storied' through the development of first person narrative accounts.

According to Daiute and Lightfoot (2004), there are four main reasons why narrative inquiry is both important and appealing. These four reasons provide a strong rationale for why narrative inquiry is commensurate with the purpose and question of my research study. First, the interpretive tools of some forms of narrative analysis have been built to explore phenomena in a holistic manner; to elicit "complex patterns and descriptions of identity, knowledge, and social relations from specific cultural points of view" (p. xii). Natural language is an essential part of this interpretive endeavor. Second, an individual's identity and psychosocial development can be explored via both narrative discourse and metaphor. Narrating is a social process or a "discourse process embodying the people, places, events, motivations, and moralities of life..." (p. xii). It is developmental because it "simulates" and "organizes" life (Daiute & Lightfoot, p. xiv). Development can be viewed as a narrative process because it maps the navigation through life as well as embodying life categories, tasks and themes. Narrative research is well-suited for developmental inquiry, particularly for this study which focuses on late adult development. Third, through narrative inquiry, insights are generated regarding the diversity of multiple, interwoven factors that sequence and reveal connections among self and society. While making use of literary concepts (e.g., plots and subplots) and figurative meanings (e.g., metaphor),

narrative inquiry builds upon what Daiute and Lightfoot refer to as the “analysis of complexity” (p. xii) by including various kinds of narrative referencings (e.g., referential meanings pointing to phenomena in the physical world and evaluative meanings pointing to the reason for telling the story). Fourth, narrative inquiry allows for value and evaluation to be part of the research process. In other words, in the telling of personal stories, two phases of meaning are interwoven through narrative discourse—referential (what happened, content) and evaluative (meaning-making) (Bruner, 1990; Labov & Waletzky, 1997). The phase of referential language includes the physical environment or what Bruner called landscapes of action. The phase of evaluative language includes reasons why the narrator is telling the story (Daiute & Lightfoot). Since I wish to illuminate and understand the meaning that older adults create in their storytelling efforts, this evaluative component within narrative inquiry complements my research aims.

Various qualitative research approaches, including phenomenology, grounded theory and narrative were considered in designing this study. Grounded theory works toward contributing to and building upon existing theory. It attempts to discover a general or abstract theory of a process, action or interaction that is grounded in the views of the participants in the study. Grounded theory is founded on a postpositive epistemology that espouses a known, verifiable and constant truth. A grounded theory approach was not seen as an appropriate choice for this study because there is a paucity of theory that specifically addresses vital living in later adulthood. A phenomenological approach was considered but it also is founded on an epistemology that seeks to discover and clarify an invariant structure—the essence of a given phenomenon. As well, the phenomenological approach to analyzing data strives to discover the invariant core structures of experience. My interest is in understanding life span development over time not a static, core state waiting to be discovered. A narrative approach was determined to be the most appropriate way of answering the research question—of holistically capturing in-

depth, subjective and developmental accounts of participants' experiences of being vitally engaged in living as older adults. There is little research on this topic from a narrative research approach.

Consistent with the method outlined by Arvay (2003) and Lieblich et al. (1998), the narrative research approach for this study will involve evoking the participants' experiences through responsive interviewing and researcher journaling. This type of narrative analysis, which attempts to read, interpret and analyze the life story of a person, and focus on the content therein, is referred as holistic-content analysis (Arvay; Lieblich et al.). A narrative approach to analysis was also seen as the most holistic way of constructing/creating and identifying common themes or the shared experiences among all the validated narratives, which can be achieved through categorical-content analysis or across narrative analysis (Lieblich et al.).

Narrative Epistemology

Postmodern narrative research is pluralistic, contextual, personal and relational (Arvay, 2003; Josselson et al., 2003). As such, it rejects the concept of one ultimate truth, and espouses the view of multiple, personal realities that are context bound (Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 1994). Within the postmodern framework, stories or narratives are recollections of experience and/or constructions of here-and-now experiences and reveal human purposes and intentions. Stories are the primary way human beings make meaning of their experiences and make themselves known (Arvay; Clandinin & Connelly; Lieblich et al., 1998; Josselson et al.; Randall & Mc Kim, 2008; Riessman, 1993).

The postmodern paradigm assumes that there are manifold, comprehensible and equally truthful realities (Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). Interactive researcher-participant dialogue is central to stimulating reflection. In the constructionist epistemology findings are co-created between the participants and the researcher through interaction, dialogue and interpretation

(Ponterotto). Thus, a narrative constructionist approach involves joint construction of the narratives and joint interpretation. Meanings are created through the research process. Overall, the stance espoused by constructionists is transactional and subjectivist and it highlights the fact that knowledge and reality are socially constructed. Narrative research is subjective, situated within a context of everyday living, uses everyday natural language and results in both individual and common narratives. As well, at the core of describing one's lived experience is the dynamic interaction between participant and researcher.

Situating the Researcher

Narrative research inquiry is a qualitative methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Riessman, 1993; Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004). Researchers who situate themselves in postmodern paradigms view ontology as including multiple, constructed, subjective realities (Ponterotto, 2005). Epistemologically, researchers situating themselves as social constructionists view reality as being constructed. I situated myself within a postmodern perspective and contended that there is no single objective truth that can be known. Rather there are many truth claims and they are situated in particular contexts, multiple and personal or subjective. I took a social constructionist approach to this research (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2001; Schwandt, 2000). I believed that during the researcher-participant relationship of in-depth conversation, understanding and meaning will surface as co-constructed knowledge (Burr; Gergen).

As a constructionist, I maintain that reality is socially constructed and concur with Ponterotto (2005) that the active engagement between researcher and participant is the key to exploring, constructing, and describing the storied lives of participants. In taking a constructionist stance, my own opinions (biases), beliefs, values and world-views were

inevitably interwoven throughout the process of the research. I underwent a process of reflexivity wherein I reflected upon the research process as it evolved from the first telephone conversation to the written narratives. Through the process of journaling, I reflected upon my own opinions, beliefs, values, and lived experiences, and acknowledged and described them to the reader. I reflected on my own subjective or personal experiences throughout the research process. Consistent with the constructionist epistemology, my role as a researcher was subjective and interactive and thus, I used the first person in the reporting of my findings.

Conduct of the Research Inquiry

Criteria for Selection of Participants

There were a number of criteria that were essential to the selection of the participants for this study. First, the participants were men and women 69 years of age and older who perceived they were living and experiencing vital lives. Both gerontological literature and theories of adult development view 65 years of age as being approximately five years into late adulthood (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 2002). Thus, all my participants had at least ten years of experiencing late adulthood. As well, 65 is the typical age when most individuals are able and expected to retire and when they are eligible to receive the Old Age Security Pension, thus most of my participants had five years or more of retirement experience. In terms of sample size, according to Creswell (1998), Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) and Rubin and Rubin (2005), data should continue to be collected and new participants added until there appears to be a wealth of data (experiences and stories). I found I needed ten participants (five men and five women) to ensure comprehensiveness or saturation in their stories has been achieved. The rationale for such a small sample is that there is no generalizability in qualitative research. Morse, 1995 defined saturation as “data adequacy” (p. 147) or “collecting data until no new information is obtained” (p. 147). I knew comprehensiveness has been achieved when I started to

see thematic patterns and became aware that a depth of knowledge had been illuminated. Specifically, no new data was being addressed in the interviews. By including both men and women in the study the findings will be more relevant to older men and women.

Kvale (1996), Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), and Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that, when conducting narrative research, participants are selected because they are able to provide thick, rich, detailed data about the topic being explored. For this to occur, the participants who are selected need to be experiencing the phenomenon under investigation in order to reflect upon it and talk about it in meaningful and detailed ways. The focus of this study was not a negative one. I did not address how older adults do not live vital lives. Participants in the study were volunteers who perceived that they were living vital lives. They were willing to participate in an in-depth research interview during which they were asked to describe, in rich detail, the meaning and their experiences of living vitally in later life. All participants were English speaking as that is the language I speak and comprehend, and they were able to verbally articulate their experiences. Finally, participants with cognitive impairment, mental illness, or a physical disability that would cause fatigue or undue stress (too weak to be interviewed for a long period of time) were excluded from the study, based on the need for clarity of communication during the data collection interviews and follow-up interview procedures. I realized that the exclusion criteria might exclude vital living adults who could not participate in the study because of the selection criteria. I do not have their stories. However, given the small sample size, I chose to select those individuals who could sustain the research and contribute their narratives without stress or fatigue.

Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures

Participants were identified and recruited through postings (Appendix A) at places seniors frequent in the greater Vancouver area (including senior's homes and activity centers, apartment

buildings, grocery stores, and restaurants whose main clientele are older adults). When necessary, permission was obtained to make a posting in each location. The poster included information describing the research study, the phenomenon that the participants must be experiencing, and an invitation to call the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. I included all respondents who met the inclusion criteria, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Respondents were screened on the telephone using a telephone screening guide (Appendix B) to confirm whether they met the previously described inclusion criteria. The phenomenon of vitality in older adults is exploratory because it has not previously been studied. Therefore, I needed to rely on potential participants' subjective self-reporting of living vitally. While screening for suitability, I conducted a telephone screening process to review the purpose and process of the research. During the telephone screening process, I mentioned that there would be at least one, and if necessary, two tape recorded, in-depth interviews of a maximum of 90 minutes. An interview time was scheduled and a location for the interview determined (e.g., the participant's home, an office at UBC) based on ensuring the participant's ease and comfort, as well as privacy. During the telephone screening process, I began to build rapport and create a safe environment for the potential participants. The telephone screening process allowed each potential participant an opportunity to ask questions and receive any needed clarification about the research study and process and their prospective involvement. The first five men and five women who met the aforementioned inclusion criteria were initially included in the study. However, I continued to recruit and keep a wait-list of all the respondents who met the inclusion criteria, in the event that additional participants were required to more fully articulate and construct the phenomenon; in other words, until there was a richness of knowledge, and patterns or themes illuminated.

Data Collection Interviews

Before beginning to interview the participants for the research study I conducted one pilot interview with an individual who I knew from my work with older adults. Having such personal knowledge would not allow the individual to be one of the participant's whose individual narratives I would co-construct. However, having the opportunity to practice conducting an interview provided me an opportunity to hone my interviewing skills. I used Rubin and Rubin's (2005) responsive interviewing approach which is based on constructionist philosophy as well as critical theory. Responsive interviewing, as proposed by Rubin and Rubin, is "shaped by the practical needs of doing interviews" (p. 30) and thus, emphasizes forming a relationship between the interviewer and the participant, generating depth of understanding, and maintaining flexibility throughout the interview process. Through the process of responsive in-depth, interactive researcher-participant conversations, reflections are elicited and findings are interpreted and co-constructed (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Ponterotto, 2005; Rubin & Rubin). Co-construction occurs throughout two stages. The first stage consists of the participants' own individual stories and the second stage is across narratives' themes. Through member checks the participants and the researcher come to agreement and that is how knowledge claims are validated and therefore, co-constructed.

I conducted one interview per participant of approximately 90 minutes in length that took place at the participant's home. Three of the participants wanted to share more about their lives than was possible in the first interview, so a second interview of approximately 60 minutes was scheduled shortly after the first interview to complete the data collection. At the outset of each data collection interview I attempted to further develop a safe and comfortable relationship with the participant. Rapport and trust building, elements of responsive interviewing that are crucial to the eliciting of thick, rich details and descriptions, developed and solidified during the

first interview. As an interviewer, an important part of my role was to build and maintain rapport and trust by keeping an open posture, being curious and non-judgmental and asking questions only to increase the depth of the exploration on topics raised by the participants.

Before the tape recording began, I secured informed consent from the participants. I gave the participants the option of either reading the consent form themselves or having me read it aloud to them (Appendix C). I tried to ensure that each participant understood the limits of confidentiality. Furthermore, I told the participants that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time during the process. The participants were also informed that if they decided to discuss sensitive experiences in their lives, they could ask me to stop the tape or to delete that recorded material from the analysis and research. They were informed that they would be able to do this at any time during the interviews. Each participant signed two copies of the consent form, one copy of which they retained for their records.

Upon obtaining written consent, the tape recorder was turned on and the interview process began. I read the orienting statement aloud (Appendix D) and asked the participant the first question: **How are you living a vital life and what does living a vital life mean to you?** The rest of the interview was unstructured. Sample questions and probes (see Appendix D) were only used as necessary for the purpose of deepening the exploration or if, at the end of the interview, the participant's story appeared to be only a surface narrative (i.e., lacking personal meaning or understanding).

Through the process of narrative interviewing (Riessman, cited in Jupp, 2006) or what Rubin and Rubin (2005) refer to as responsive or "depth" (p. vii) interviewing, I viewed the interview as a "conversation" (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Riessman, in Jupp, p.190; Rubin & Rubin, p.12). In other words, the interview became a discourse between myself and the research participant within which the rules of day-to-day conversation applied including

taking turns, maintaining relevancy, and moving into and out of what Riessman describes as a “story world” (p.190). Together the interviewee (narrator) and I (listener/questioner) explored meanings and associations that surfaced and connected various experiences and stories (Riessman). According to Kvale, Riessman, and Rubin and Rubin, throughout the interviewing process, I needed to be cognizant that I was seeking to understand the participants’ experiences in all their complexity, and therefore, rich details and accounts of specific incidents needed to be evoked rather than focusing the interview on general evaluations of participants’ experiences.

Creating a safe, non-judgmental environment for the research participant is extremely important in responsive depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I made every effort to create a safe environment that contributed to a comfortable, non-threatening, open-ended questioning process that encouraged the participants to speak to the topics, themes, concerns, meanings, awareness and insight that mattered to them (Josselson et al., 2003; Lieblich, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Riessman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin). Creation of a safe environment also enhanced what Rubin and Rubin view the relationship of researcher and participant as being—one of mutual influence in which there is recognition that individuality is at the core of the interviewing process. Initially, it was important that I asked broader questions so that the participants could speak to these questions from their own life worlds and experiences. The answers that the participants provided led me to further areas of exploration and discovery (Rubin & Rubin). In opening up the interviews to extended narrations by the interviewees, I was aware that I was giving up some control, thereby following my participants along their paths. However, Riessman (in Jupp, 2006) and Rubin and Rubin acknowledge that sharing power in interviews has the potential to further illuminate phenomena.

The overall purpose of interviewing is to find out how the participants know what they know about the phenomenon under study—living vitally as an older adult. In order to achieve

the goal of a firm, deep understanding of the topic under study, together with the participants I explored context, examined complex themes, and focused on specific events, meanings and historical influences (Riessman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As well, I, through the use of probes, meaning-making questions, metaphors, and tangible representations got at the participants' tacit knowledge of how they understood themselves to be living vitally. To reach greater depths of understanding required tolerance on my part for uncertainty. I followed up on every new important finding by asking more or different meaning-making questions about what I heard and refocusing on relevant ideas or themes (Josselson et al., 2003; Riessman; Rubin & Rubin). Thus, the process of conducting this narrative research (interviewing, interpreting and analyzing) required from me what Daiute and Fine (2003) recognize as a "balance between courage and anxiety" (p. 7).

My experience in working with clients in counselling psychology prepared me to have a high tolerance for uncertainty and to be able to work effectively with unexpected twists and turns in the interviews. I used my training as a counsellor and brought an attitude of active listening, respect, acceptance, understanding and genuine caring to each interview. I attempted to be as non-directive as possible in my responses during each interview, however, if the participants drifted off topic I became more directive and used immediacy to help maintain focus on the phenomena of vital living. It was also important that, as much as possible, I refrained from imposing my own views on to the participants. Self-reflection and self-awareness through journaling, and discussing any concerns I had about my biases with my supervision committee and my colleagues, helped me to examine my own biases and, as much as possible, to listen to the participants' stories without viewing them through my own world view and cultural lens (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I was what Kvale (1996) refers to as the "research instrument" in this study (p. 147); in other words, I immersed myself in the topic of the

interview and brought to the conversation knowledge and experience in the interaction. It was critical that I kept the questions in close range to the issues about which the participants had knowledge and wanted to share. This helped ensure that the findings were fresh, comprehensible, and that they resonated with the participants (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993).

How I conducted myself in each interview, what I believed, what I felt, and how I acted, had the potential to greatly impact the quality of the conversational exchange. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that interviewing style is influenced by the interviewer's interpersonal style. It was important for me to acknowledge and understand my own interpersonal style before and during the interviewing process. Balancing my interpersonal style with each unique interviewee included how much empathy I used, prudent use of questions and probes, determining which interviews need to be extended, deciding which interviews would benefit from more personal disclosure, and so forth. Keeping this in mind, I reflected and journalled on my interpersonal style, as well as immersing myself in reading, reflecting and discussing with my peers, colleagues, supervisors and other experts in the field of gerontology and counselling psychology the topic to be studied. Through engagement in this multifaceted process, I was better prepared to enter into a conversation with an open mind and be openly curious about the participant's story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin).

Taking a constructionist approach means that narrative analysis begins with the very first interview, as the researcher seeks to ensure that the research study makes sense and is important and relevant to the participants (Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each interview tape was identified via a number code and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my private office. The audio-tapes will be kept for five years upon completion of my final doctoral defense and then erased.

Development of the Narratives from the Transcribed Interviews

Transcription is an integral part of the qualitative analysis process (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Mishler, 1991; Ochs, 1979; Poland, 1995). I followed Lapadat and Lindsay's (1999) method of transcription. Lapadat and Lindsay emphasize that the process of transcription includes not only the written down words, but the analysis of those words and the understandings that come from the construction of the transcript through listening and re-listening. Transcription "facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data" (Lapadat & Lindsay, p. 82). I transcribed each tape recorded interview verbatim, in order to pay close attention to what was said and to help me prepare for the next interview. This allowed me to transcribe everything that I heard and recalled seeing, including pauses, facial expressions, body language, utterances, affective expressions, and so forth. I only included enough ums, ahs, hmms, uhs, and so forth to understand the flavor of the interview. The transcription key included symbols for things such as participant's emotionality, loudness or softness, body language, and major pauses. Throughout the transcription process, I was cognizant of being "open to multiple alternative readings, as well as reinterpretation with every fresh reading" (Poland, p. 292).

Overall, I followed Lieblich et al.'s (1998) holistic-content approach to read, interpret, and analyze each participant's story. This interpretive work was well-served by conducting a type of analysis that involves considering the whole story and focusing on its content (Lieblich et al.). This resulted in a written individual narrative for each participant. As well, I used Lieblich et al.'s categorical content approach to construct the common themes across all the participants' narratives which resulted in a written "common" narrative. Lieblich et al. point out that many narrative studies use a combination of strategies from the four modes of reading a narrative which also include holistic-form and categorical-form. A holistic-form reading looks at a whole

life story but its focus is on the story's formal components, for example, plot progression, rather than its contents. A categorical-form reading looks at formal components of distinct sections of a whole story, for example, plot analysis of separate parts of the text.

In the reading of each participant's life story, I attempted to shape a holistic-content image of each individual's self as portrayed in the interviews. Five main steps were involved in the process of reading holistically for content. Lieblich et al. (1998) recommend as a first step that the interviews be read a number of times until a main focus for the entire story emerges. It was essential that I read or listened to each interview "carefully" and "empathically," keeping an "open mind" (Lieblich et al., p. 62). During this phase of analysis, I needed to believe in my ability to discover the meaning of the data. Just as Lieblich et al. suggest, the meaning of the text did "speak" to me (p. 62). Although there are no specific directions for this stage of analysis, I followed the authors' suggestion that I note significant aspects of the life story such as the beginning of the story and the participants' positive or negative evaluations of stages of their stories.

During the second step of the analysis, I wrote out my initial and global impressions of each participant's story (Lieblich, 1998). At this stage, I needed to be aware of and document any exceptions to the overall impression and note discrepancies such as contradictions or descriptions left unfinished. Anything that disturbed the participant during the narration of his or her story or caused disharmony in the story was noted during this stage of the analysis.

Step three involved deciding on what specific foci of content or themes I chose to follow throughout the story (from beginning to end). I followed Lieblich et al.'s (1998) suggestion and determined this special focus based on: the space that the theme was given in the text; its repetitiveness; and the elaboration of details that the participant provided about it. I also took

care to note themes that had been omitted or only briefly alluded to, as they might also have been interpreted as being a special focus.

As step four, I used Arvay's (2003) modified version of four interpretive readings of the transcript to engage the text, in a meaningful way, from four different standpoints. As well as facilitating interpretation of the participants' transcribed texts, Arvay's method of interpretation facilitated application of the four readings "to my own interactions in the transcript" (p. 8). The interviews were co-constructed and it was incumbent on me to understand the effect that I had on the construction of the research transcripts. The four interpretive readings of the transcript included: reading for content; reading for the self of the narrator and noting the narrator's 'I' positions to illuminate the ways in which the participant constructed himself or herself within the text; reading for the research question to uncover the participants' responses to the research question; and reading critically to discover the participants' voices and to understand their history, cultural context, and the social world in which their stories are situated.

Step five involved keeping track of the results of the analysis in a variety of ways. For example, I followed each theme from beginning to end and noted all conclusions (Lieblich et al., 1998). I noted where a theme first appeared and where it stopped, when transitions between themes occurred, what the context was for each theme and each theme's relative prominence in the story. Once again I was aware of any discrepancies or contradictions in terms of themes by the narrator, especially with regard to content or mood or evaluation. The holistic-content approach to reading, interpreting and analyzing participants' transcribed interviews allowed me to immerse myself in the data, including data from my personal journal, so that I was able to write a coherent, chronologically ordered, narrative account of each participant's experience of living a vital life.

In order to read across all the participants' narratives and develop one common research narrative, I also conducted a categorical-content analysis of the transcribed interviews using Lieblich et al.'s (1998) narrative categorical-content perspective. This was in accordance with my research goal of constructing and understanding how older adults live vital lives and my use of narrative methodology. The four steps involved in the categorical-content perspective included: selection of the subtext; definition of the content categories; sorting the material into the categories; and drawing conclusions from the results (Lieblich et al.). A narrative categorical-content approach to reading, interpreting and analyzing across all the participants' transcribed interviews and individual narratives as well as my journal data, resulted in one written narrative of the common themes involved in living a vital life as experienced and narrated by all of the participants in the study.

Validation Interviews

The final interviews were two 30 minute follow-up validation interviews (Appendix E) which took place at the homes of the participants. After I developed the first person narratives I contacted each participant for a follow-up validation interview. I conducted a final validation interview with each participant to validate the rigor of the common themes narrative. The participants had an opportunity to review their narratives and the common narrative over a two week period before our validation meetings. I encouraged the participants to indicate whether their individual narrative and the collective narrative accurately captured and resonated with their experiences. I took the participants' comments and feedback into consideration when I wrote up the final results. Confirmation of the content of each narrative with the participant was a powerful way of validating the research findings (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Criteria for the Rigor of the Study

The four criteria that informed the rigor of this study included resonance, pragmatic value, comprehensiveness, and coherence (Kvale, 1996; Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The above criteria are considered to be the gold standards for rigor and are the ones commonly used in narrative research (Lieblich et al.; Riessman).

Coherence: Were the findings understandable? Did the narratives create a complete and meaningful picture? The use of validation interviews and peer reviews helped ensure that coherence was attained. According to Lieblich et al., (1998), coherence can be evaluated internally (do the parts fit together) and externally (against previous research and existing theories).

Comprehensiveness: Were the narratives full enough? In other words, the description and details needed to be thick and rich. Thick description was reached via deep reflexivity and first person accounts that combined to reveal depth of emotional coloring or emotionality. Perceptivity is important in narrative research (Barone & Eisner, 1997) and is generated through rich detail and description, especially through “seeing what most people miss” (p. 93). Multiple methods and procedures such as researcher journaling, validation interviews (member checks) and peer checks ensured that I achieved a greater depth of interpretation and richer, thicker details and description.

Resonance: Resonance included participant validation interviews. It was essential that the individual narratives and the collective narrative resonated with the participants, adequately and accurately capturing their experiences of living vital lives. As well, it was powerful to have three peer reviewers who felt they were living vital lives read and validate the common narrative as capturing their experiences of living vitally. As well, three expert reviewers (two registered psychologists and the executive director of a seniors’ centre) who worked with or were interested

in older adults were able to validate the common narrative as an accurate reflection of living a vital life.

Pragmatic Value: Pragmatic value was achieved because reciprocity (a mutual give and take) occurred during the research process. It was important to ascertain what the research process offered back to the participants and what it added to their lives. This was achieved during the validation interview. As well, in order for a study to have pragmatic value, it needs to provide certain information that enables a community of researchers to determine if the work is trustworthy, for example, did the study make visible what was done. I ensured visibility by leaving an audit trail of the entire research process. As well, expert reviewers were able to ascertain that the experiences/stories and common themes across narratives had the potential to be beneficial to people working in the field of gerontology, counselling psychology, and/or adult education.

Presuppositions and Expectations

I began the process of self-examination by identifying and articulating my presuppositions and expectations. I have strong feelings about older adults and how I believe they are viewed and treated by society. In my work and friendships with older adults, my personal experience as a caregiver to my parents, my assessment work with older adults, and my wide reading and reflecting upon what it means to be older, especially what it means to enter late adulthood in Western society, I have thought deeply about my research topic. I have reflected on my biases and assumptions and have attempted to identify them below. I was cognizant that as the research progressed, biases and assumptions of which I might not have been aware might surface. My clinic, practicum, and assessment experiences prepared me to be aware when personal biases and assumptions arose and to reflect on what was happening for me. When this happened, I called on

colleagues and members of my research committee for their help in acknowledging, working through, and clarifying what I was feeling and thinking.

My specific bias is that, generally, I believe that Western society is ageist, both explicitly and implicitly. This stems in large part from what I view as a ‘disconnect’ between a large segment of both younger and older generations and the overwhelming importance that society has placed on ‘productivity’ in the here-and-now as opposed to the value and dignity inherent in a life lived into and including old age. Similar to Schachter-Shalomi and Miller (1995), I believe that Western culture still projects negative images and expectations of old age as a time of unrelenting diminished vigor, waning self-esteem and social uselessness, and of aging as a process of unavoidable personal diminishment and disengagement from vital living. I agree with Nelson (2002) that, over time, ageist attitudes, stereotyping and stigmatizing are internalized by many members of the oldest population, leading to a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Personally I have great respect for older adults, especially because of the hardships many of them have endured and survived, and the contributions they have made to society throughout their lives. I believe that many older adults have a treasury of insight and wisdom to bestow on younger generations if only the generations could connect with one another in meaningful ways. For this to happen, both sides have to listen to one another. Perhaps my overriding bias is that I have tended to view older adults in too positive a light.

From reading the literature on, and my work and friendships with, older men and women, there are a number of expectations that I had regarding older adults who are living vital and satisfactory lives. I expected that vitally living older adults possess certain dispositional factors and emotional qualities that predispose and/or help them to live psychologically, physically and/or socially healthy and vigorous lives and help them to face the significant challenges inherent to the aging process. Knowing that social connectedness or social support is especially

important for older adults to remain engaged in community and society and therefore, not become isolated, I anticipated that the participants in my study would have at least some healthy relationships. I assumed that my interviewees would be committed to giving of themselves to others, for example, their family, their community, and/or their society. This process of generativity may occur through grandparenting/great grandparenting, mentoring, volunteering, storytelling, creative endeavors, recreational endeavors, or what Schachter-Shalomi and Miller (1995) refer to as “harvesting their lives” (p. 2). The act of harvesting one’s life encompasses being in the process of successfully completing one’s life, acknowledging and enjoying one’s life contributions, and passing on a legacy to future generations.

Because human beings are individuals who are unique in many ways, I believe that older adults live and age vitally in diverse, multifaceted ways. I expected the participants in my study to reveal individual differences in the way that they are living, experiencing and defining a vital life. It is my contention that living well or successfully as an older adult also entails having a reason for living and a desire for learning. Therefore, I anticipated that the individuals participating in my study will be life-long learners who are still able to set and achieve goals to lesser or greater degrees and are leading purposeful or meaningful lives.

I also believe that reflecting on one’s life and coming to terms with that life is a necessary task in order for older adults to achieve integrity and coherence and to maintain vital involvement in living. I expected that the participants in my study would have reflected on their whole lives, to greater or lesser degrees. Older adults who identify themselves as vitally engaged in living will, most likely, be living with a variety of physical complaints, ailments, diseases or disabilities. I expected that the participants in my study would be coping or managing to the best of their capacity, emotionally and psychologically, with whatever physical problems they had

and, further, would potentially find some amount of personal meaning in or from their physical losses.

Through journaling, constructing haikus, and the process of co-constructing the narratives, I made a conscious effort to articulate my own involvement in the results of the research so that others may judge its trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

When I interviewed my older adult participants, it was important that I remembered the uniqueness of each participant. In other words, like younger individuals, older adults are representative of a diverse group of individuals. I responded to each person on an individual basis (Patterson & Dupree, 1994; Wenger, 2003).

Confidentiality was maintained throughout and after the research process. I was responsible for protecting all data. With regard to older adults who are research participants, this included protecting data from relatives and service providers (Wenger, 2003). Wenger also suggests that I needed to ask for the participants' permission to seek professional help if the need arose. If I discovered that the participants were at risk due to physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or financial abuse, and they did not want me to take action on their behalf, it would have been my responsibility to discuss this with my supervision committee. There are a number of protocols in place in British Columbia specifically related to older adults, which I could have followed if I suspected that my participants were being harmed. Ultimately, my actions and decisions would have been based on ensuring the safety of the older participant (Wenger, 2003).

Wenger (2003) elucidates a number of considerations that I kept in mind when interviewing my participants. First, it was possible that my participants might have had some special challenges, such as physical, sensory and/or cognitive impairments. I was sensitive and

responsive to these possibilities. Second, reciprocity is important in maintaining a research relationship with older adults and it was incumbent upon me to maintain the reciprocal relationship. Wenger (2003) suggests that, with in-depth interviewing, the establishment of a reciprocal relationship is particularly important. As well, when dealing with older adults in a research relationship, the specter of exploitation of a vulnerable population could be raised at any time. This is an ethical dilemma that Wenger states as being a “matter of conscience for each interviewer to decide...for him or herself” (p. 124). I was aware of this potential dilemma and processed any issues in this regard through journaling and/or in discussions with the members of my research committee.

Ethically, researchers are responsible for educating themselves about their participants’ cultures (Wenger, 2003). Specifically, Wenger (2003) states that researchers need to ascertain the “expectations, assumptions, and practices” associated with the aging process for the specific cultural groups that the individuals they are working with identify with (p. 125). It was incumbent upon me to be sensitive to, and educate myself about the ethnicity and culture of each of my participants.

Ethically, I was responsible for making my role clear at the beginning of the research process. I informed my participants as to the approximate timeline for the research study. As well, I provided the participants in the study with a list of referral sources for professional help if the interview process caused them discomfort or distress (Appendix F).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this study I interviewed ten participants—aged 69 to 85 years of age—who identified themselves as being vitally engaged in living. One of the participants—Jane—was 69 years of age and within a few months of her 70th birthday at the time of the interview. Given that she was in her 70th year, it was determined that she met the inclusion criteria. Jane’s participation was particularly important given that she was the only person in the study who had never partnered or married and who had been coping with serious health challenges for several years. Despite these challenges, she was resolute in her belief that she was living a very vital life. I felt strongly that having a participant in the study who had been coping with such significant health issues and still perceived herself to be living a vital life, and was in her 70th year, might contribute significantly to the study. Five of the participants provided pseudonyms for themselves. Five of the participants wanted their own names to be used throughout the research process including on their biographies and individual narratives. The intent of the interviewing process was two-fold: to learn more about how later life adults narrate their experiences of being vitally engaged in living and to learn how they understand or make meaning of their experiences of vital living. One outcome of this study was that it created ten stories of what the experiences of living vital lives in later life is like. Another outcome was the co-construction of ten participant biographies of vitally engaged older men and women which revealed a lot of homogeneity, but also some heterogeneity among the participants. A third outcome was the identification of ten interwoven meta-themes or factors and relevant subthemes that constituted living vitally engaged in the eighth and ninth decades of life.

Individual Narratives’ Overview

After transcribing the 10 interviews, 10 individual narratives (see Appendix G) were co-constructed and written. From the perspective of each individual’s life, the significance of

important experiences and events and the meaning of living vitally engaged in later life could be more fully understood. This provided a broader and deeper comprehension of how some men and women were able to create and construct experiences of vital living in their eighth and ninth decades amidst some significant challenges and losses and to make these experiences meaningful and satisfying. The narrative accounts also illuminated the uniqueness and diversity of each woman and man, past and present. Each participant told a story about their experiences of being vitally engaged in living that included a beginning, middle, and end. In telling their stories, events or happenings were often told out of chronological order. In the writing of the individual narratives, I have tried to make the events unfold chronologically by condensing the participants' transcribed interviews into individual narrative accounts. By co-constructing the journey of vital living for each woman and man, I hoped to highlight the significant events and experiences that constitute a vital life.

I struggled with how to represent the individual narratives within the dissertation. It was critical to me that the participants' stories be included intact, within the document, in order that their stories be read and their voices be heard. I wholeheartedly agreed with Wenger (2003) that it is essential and ethical to give back to the research participants and that by including their stories in the document, I would be giving back to them. However, the length of each individual story would not allow for their inclusion in chapter four and I could not, in good conscience, include only one or two stories. I decided to construct brief individual biographies for each participant to include in chapter four and to situate all of the individual narratives in the appendices. In this way the stories of each participant would be represented and honored.

Participants' Biographies

Ten individuals (five females and five males) participated in the study of older adults who feel they are living vital lives. Their biographies are presented in the order of their initial

interviews. Whether the participants' energy or vitality was electric or more subdued in its intensity, I left the interviews feeling revitalized. I always left feeling I had been in the presence of individuals who are wise and keen to share their wisdom. Each participant, in his or her own way, was a wonderful and compelling storyteller.

I have created and included a haiku for each individual in the study. In three short lines of poetry I attempted to express a profound moment of vital living experienced either literally or figuratively by each participant—what Patricia Donegan, writer and senior meditation teacher, refers to as the “Haiku moment” (Donegan, 2008, p. XI).

Don (75 years old)

in the forest
chainsaw in hand,
hammering away on seven cylinders

“Be exciting to others,” is Don’s metaphor and belief for living a vital life. This physically wiry man is a force of energy and dynamism who is feisty, at times fiery, and most often passionate in his beliefs and how he states them. He literally crackles with intensity as he talks quickly with few pauses and with a strong, loud, and vital voice. He quickly revealed a sensitive and vulnerable side and openness to showing and expressing feelings. At times he was moved to tears when a particular memory or feeling was evoked.

Don was born in June, 1936 in a tent in a farming community in Saskatchewan. His parents were of English and Irish descent and he was one of six siblings, all boys. He reflected on being raised in a house that totaled 12 feet by 18 feet and being “altogether poor.” According to Don, his relationship with his father was difficult and he suffered physical, verbal, and emotional abuse from him. He left home at 15 years of age to run someone else’s farm, joined the Air Force at 18 years of age and trained to be a fighter pilot. He left the air force and eventually became a real estate agent in the early 1960s and then president of a well known real estate company. In 1984, he moved to Whistler, B.C. and worked as a real estate agent as well as

starting a development company. In 2001, Don retired from the real estate business and focused on his development company. Currently he works as a developer and commercial landlord, spending “seven days a week looking after things.”

Don married at age 21 and his wife and he had three children, one daughter and two sons aged 48 through 52 years. He has 11 grandchildren and one great grandchild. After 18 years of marriage Don and his first wife divorced. He married his current wife in 1975; however, they now live apart most of the time. Don considers himself to be well-off socioeconomically. According to Don he is in excellent health and has no health issues or challenges.

Elisabeth (70 years old)

looking at the water
steering my course—
every day a new beginning.

“If there’s no wind, everybody row” is Elisabeth’s metaphor for living a vital life. She believes that when things are not happening everybody has to chip in and work together to make things happen. This is how she has lived her life. Elisabeth came across during the interview as an incredibly gracious woman who, although facing very significant health challenges, is living a full life. Her energy and quiet intensity were palpable throughout the interviews. She talks very quickly with very few pauses. She showed self-possession, calmness, conviction, and at times, passion. Elisabeth was open to feeling and expressing feelings and became tearful when remembering certain meaningful memories.

Elisabeth was born in August, 1940 in Edmonton, Alberta and has lived “on and off” in B.C. for 68 years. Her parents were of Scottish, Irish, and German descent. She is an only child but has a large extended family with whom she is close. She recalls growing up not seeing her father for the first five years of her life because he was a fighter pilot and was fighting in the

war. In essence, Elisabeth reported being raised by a ‘single mother’ during that time period. Her mother with whom she had a very close relationship died recently at 91 years of age.

Elisabeth has one year of college/vocational training and is a retired certified dental assistant. Previously she volunteered in “all kinds” of capacities, considering herself “a jack-of-all-trades” when it comes to volunteer work. Elisabeth has never been married.

Socioeconomically, she considers herself to be middle class. Elisabeth has a number of very significant and potentially life-threatening medical conditions and health challenges that have required surgeries and continuing medical monitoring and care.

Shirley (81 years old)

losing myself
playing the violin—
a cloud moves peacefully across the sky.

“Butterflies are free” is Shirley’s metaphor for vital living. She lives her life empowering herself to be free and for her, being free means she has done something with her life. This petite, elegant woman has bright red hair and striking blue eyes. She radiates energy, is intense and at times, electric. Shirley moves quickly. She speaks quite fast and is very articulate. She is lively, gracious and appears very hospitable. She opened up immediately, sharing her innermost feelings and concerns and joys.

Shirley was born in July, 1929 in Detroit, Michigan, USA and has lived in Canada since the 1930s. She spent her childhood and most of her adolescence in Nova Scotia and moved to Ontario to go to university. She has lived in BC for the past 20 years. Her parents are both of Irish decent. Shirley was the second oldest of five siblings, four girls and a boy. She was very close to her father whom she credits with teaching her the values she lives by and sparking her passion for self-examination.

Shirley has a degree in music from the University of Toronto and was a music teacher. In early mid life she went to college and completed her business administration certificate and began a business career. She married shortly after graduating with her music degree (age 20 years) and has three children, two sons and a daughter, aged 58 to 60 years. She has been divorced for 37 years and never remarried. She has worked in a volunteer capacity with children with Downs' Syndrome and female seniors. Shirley considers her socioeconomic status to be middle class. According to her she has always enjoyed excellent health and continues to do so currently. She has no medical conditions and is on no medications.

Jean (72 years old)

glorious sun
illuminating the dancers
saying, *you are free!*

“A whole bunch of people dancing around, like a circle” is Jean’s metaphor for living a vital life. She wants to be, in her words, “out of the box.” Being alive and vital for Jean is about connection with others and having fun and being active while connecting with others. She is vibrant, intense, and spontaneous. Upon first meeting her I was drawn to her incredible hazel eyes and her zest. She is passionate and very funny. Even in moments of quiet self-reflection Jean exudes energy and strength. She is open about her life and expresses her feelings and beliefs freely.

Jean was born in February, 1939 on her parents’ farm “homestead” in Saskatchewan and was delivered by her “granny.” Her parents were of Ukrainian descent. She was the middle child of three. Her baby brother died shortly after birth and her older brother died at the age of 55 years. She had a difficult relationship with both her mother and her brother. Her father, whom she felt closest to spent winters working in a copper mine in Ontario in order to subsidize the family’s income. When she was a toddler she was molested by a “hired hand,” something she

never revealed to family members until her mid-life. In the early 1980s, Jean began a “journey of self-examination” through therapy—a process she refers to as healing and life-changing.

Jean went to a business college after grade 12 and eventually became a lab technician through an apprenticeship. Her first marriage lasted 15 years and she has a daughter, aged 34 years and an infant granddaughter who live in Ontario. She married her second husband in 1996 after approximately four or five years of knowing each other. Jean is a hospice volunteer and also volunteers at a care facility as a music page turner. She describes her socioeconomic status as middle class. Currently she explains she has a “glitch” in her heart which means her heart rate becomes more irregular under physical stress. She has breathing challenges due to having smoked. She has a hyperactive thyroid for which she receives homeopathic treatment. The only medication she takes is for hypertension tendencies.

Art (83 years old)

*ki-yi-yi—
the dog sings contentedly
sitting beside the rhododendron bush.*

“Live your life like a dog” is Art’s metaphor for living a vital life. Having a balanced and relaxed life, taking pleasure from simple things and doing what he wants to do, enjoying and revelling in life, and “going with the flow a bit” is how he lives vitally. This tall, lanky man with clear, sparkling blue eyes, silvering hair and a boyish laugh appeared to be in his 60s when in fact he is in his early 80s. Whether sitting, standing or moving, Art radiated eagerness and energy. He is exuberant. He talks quickly and the excitement he feels when he talks about the things he loves is palpable. He was open about himself and expressed feelings, thoughts and opinions freely. He appeared to have a wonderful sense of humour.

Art was born in May, 1928 in Vancouver, BC and has lived in Canada most of his life. His parents were of English and Scottish decent. He is the eldest of two sons and considers

himself to be a “depression baby” who grew up in a working class family. At the time of the interview, Art and his wife had been married for approximately 60 years and had a daughter and son aged 54 and 57 years. Since the interview, however, Art’s wife passed away after several years in long term care due to dementia. Art has been living with his current partner for approximately 4 years.

Art graduated with a degree in commerce from UBC and later secured his accountancy designation. At 40 years of age he started a doctoral program at a university in Washington State. After receiving his Ph. D., he and his family moved to Eastern Canada where he began his second career as an accounting professor at university. After approximately one and a half years he moved back to the Lower Mainland and became a tenured associate professor at a Vancouver university. At age 50 years, Art decided that he did not want to remain an academic and left the security of a tenured position to begin a third career as a self-employed business consultant. Art took up the ukulele in his late 70s and currently volunteers in a band. He describes his socioeconomic status as upper middle class. His health is excellent and since our last interview Art has had cataract surgery and got hearing aids.

John Carson (84 years old)

euphoria:
the mountain soars,
I soar.

“Enjoy life—it’s a short trip” is the metaphor that John reflected as representing living life vitally at age 82 years. It epitomizes how he has chosen to cope with the significant personal challenges he has faced throughout his life and how he has made meaning of profound losses. At a young age John decided to live life doing the things he valued and wanted to do and thus “making the most of every day.” John’s blue eyes illuminate his face. He appears to have the gift of grace and serenity and in many ways reminds me of the fictional character, Atticus Finch,

from “To Kill a Mockingbird.” In telling his story, John showed a store of deep compassion both for others and himself. He is lively and talks quickly and radiates a calm energy. When John talked of those he loves and the memories they created together I felt I was joining him in a very spiritual, reverent, deeply moving and beautiful place. He is a reflective, open and expressive individual who has experienced a significant number of personal losses in his life.

John was born in St. John’s, Newfoundland in June, 1927. He has lived in BC since 1987. His parents were of Scottish and English decent. He is the eldest of two siblings; his younger sister died in 1994. His father drowned at the age of 28 years while trying to save someone. John was one year old. His mother died at 34 years of age from aricephalus. John was seven years old at the time she died. He was raised by his grandparents. He was married for 48 years. His wife died in 1995. Together with his wife, he raised four daughters. His oldest daughter died in 1996 of brain cancer. He has six grandchildren. John married his common-law partner of 10 years in the fall of 2010.

John has a BSc in Biology and was Regional Manager for the Atlantic Provinces for a business forms company. In his early 40s, he went back to university and attained a BA in Psychology, but decided not to change his career. When he retired at age 60 years, his wife and he moved to Vancouver at the urging of his daughters who were all living in BC. He volunteered for the Big Brothers organization and was a member of their board for five years. He also volunteered working with troubled adolescent males for three years. Currently he hikes mountains with a group of seniors and has taught them to snowshoe. John considers his socioeconomic status to be “comfortable.” He was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer. Otherwise, his only medical challenge is high blood pressure which is under control with medication.

Clarence (82 years old)

nature evolving:
spring buds leafing
fascinating!

“Nature” and “the natural evolution of the seasons” is Clarence’s metaphor for his vital life. According to Clarence, his passion and love for nature and being an intimate witness to its unfolding throughout the year enlivens him. It is visually evident that he does not live his life or think in terms of age because he appeared so much younger than his 81 years. His blue eyes are direct and are beacons of vitality. Perhaps more than anything what struck me about Clarence was his tremendous energy. He exudes tremendous passion for living and seeing and understanding. He is open, eloquent, and down-to-earth. When he talks his hands are so expressive and he uses them to underline the feelings behind his words. He appears to exude confidence somewhat tempered by humility; resourcefulness tempered by vulnerability; and, a sense of feeling blessed even after experiencing significant life challenges. He seems to be a consummate gentleman, soft-spoken and gracious. His thoughts fly and he talks quickly and vigorously. He is fully animated, but not loud. He shares his experiences honestly and vibrantly and with tremendous excitement. Throughout the interview he reflected on, and processed his life story.

Clarence was born in January, 1929 and was raised in Coverdale, BC and has lived in Canada all his life. His parents were Caucasian, of British descent. His father was a farmer. Clarence was the eldest of four siblings, three boys and a girl. He grew up during World War II which sparked a lifetime interest in history and far off countries. He graduated from grade 12 and built a career in the food industry, moving from part time work during high school to assistant manager to store manager to District Manager to CEO.

Clarence was married for 53 years and became a widower approximately five years ago. He has two sons aged 50 and 55 years, three grandchildren and one great grandchild. Clarence considers himself to be “well off” socioeconomically. He has high blood pressure which is controlled with medication, and recently he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Henry (86 years old)

my kayak passes
a bald eagle on a dead salmon—
defiant eyes watch me.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it” is the metaphor Henry chose to describe how one lives a vital life at the midpoint of their ninth decade. He personifies the ‘using’ part of his metaphor by engaging in a myriad of activities and experiences, at least one or two every day. When I first talked to Henry on the phone I was struck by his beautiful and cultured English accented voice. In person, he is physically slightly built, has white hair and a beard, and his eyes sparkle. He has a wry sense of humour, a lovely smile, and laughs a lot both at himself and the way life unfolds. He seems open, energetic, calm, patient and very kind. He appears spiritual, musical, artistic, poetic and to be a healer (physician). Yet he also seems humble and modest. Henry paused often while telling his story, taking a lot of time for reflection and processing.

Henry was born in May, 1924 in Windsor, England and immigrated to Canada in 1952. His parents were Caucasian, of British descent. He was the younger of two sons. His family was middle class. His father participated in both World Wars and became a brigadier. He was a businessman in civilian life. Henry experienced firsthand the intense bombing of English cities during World War II. He graduated with a Medical Degree from Oxford, England in 1947 and practiced as a family doctor throughout his career.

Henry has been married for 54 years and has four children, three sons and one daughter ages 46 to 53 years. He has four grandchildren. Henry volunteered with the Big Brothers

Organization for approximately 18 years, at a children's camp for 25 years and in a hospital in Haiti for a couple of months every year from 1995 to 2003. Henry considers himself to be "comfortable" socioeconomically. His health is excellent except for having cataracts.

Margarita (78 years old)

a tennis racquet
held lovingly
breathing connection.

"Health" is the metaphor Margarita chose to symbolize living vitally in later life. She reflects on the necessity of having good health in order for her life to be a vital one. For Margarita having health means she can participate in the activities that she enjoys. On the phone Margarita's voice was rich in tone and melodious and welcoming and comforting, as it is in person. Her West Indian accent is discernable. Margarita is petite with beautiful brown eyes which drew me to her immediately. She is an enthusiastic individual—open and down-to-earth. She has a rich, robust belly laugh that speaks to her genuineness and great sense of humour. Throughout the interview she spent a lot of time reflecting and processing, appearing to speak from a place of reflection. There was an almost measured quality to her narration of living vitally and understanding what that means. It was important for her to feel comfortable that she was on the right track during the interview and she asked me lots of questions in that regard.

Margarita was born in March, 1933 in Trinidad, West Indies to parents of English and Spanish descent. She is the eldest of six siblings, four girls and two boys. She graduated from grade 12 with a Cambridge certificate and then went to College for secretarial training. Her life career was first as a secretary, and later as an executive assistant. She married at age 23 years. She had no children. In 1968, at 35 years of age, Margarita divorced her husband and moved to Toronto, Canada.

In 1970 Margarita moved to Vancouver. She retired from her career at age 65 (mandatory retirement). She is currently single. She has had a number of relationships but never remarried. She previously volunteered visiting with seniors and most recently for the Harvest Project. Currently she is deciding which organization she would like to volunteer for. Socioeconomically Margarita sees herself as middle class. Her health is good. Currently she has high blood pressure which is under control, and osteopenia, the stage before osteoporosis.

Helen (73 years old)

in my garden—
peaceful sanctuary
is a place of lively connection.

“Running on a treadmill” is the metaphor that Helen believes captures what it currently means for her to live a vital life. She can do all sorts of exercise and other things on a treadmill including going fast or slow; laughing; skipping; and, enjoying being stupid and having fun. On a treadmill Helen is moving and keeping going. On a treadmill Helen’s mind is free to “direct” her to “dance.” Helen has a gentle, lilting, very expressive voice. Her English accent is still discernable. She is lively and energetic and very open with her feelings and her life story. She appears to be a passionate individual, especially about her beliefs and values. She seems proactive in all aspects of her life. Helen has a great sense of humour and is wonderfully down-to-earth.

Helen was born in August, 1937 in Guilford, Surrey, England. Her parents were Caucasian and of British descent. She is the youngest of five siblings, four of whom are still living. One brother died at 36 years of age. Helen’s father was a “first World War victim” and she believes that he most likely suffered untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Helen grew up on a farm. At 18 years of age she began training as a nurse and moved to Liverpool, England. She moved to Canada in 1962, first to Toronto and then to BC.

Helen met her husband in 1964. They married and began to raise a family, two daughters and a son aged 38 to 40 years. She has four grandchildren. While raising her family, she worked part time. She volunteers by running support groups for spouses and their partners who have a debilitating disease. Socioeconomically, she considers herself to be comfortable. Helen enjoys good health and recovered very well after having a hip replacement last year.

Outline of Common Meta Themes and Subthemes in Living a Vital Life

From comparing narratives describing each participant's own experiences of living vitally and their understanding of what living vitally means 10 common themes and subthemes therein were identified:

1. Adequate Finances

- The importance of freedom from worrying about having enough money
- The critical role of having enough money to support their current vital lives and activities

2. Satisfying Relationships

- The critical role of close, supportive relationships with family members and friends
- The importance of an active and vital social life, engaging with other people with similar interests

3. Lifelong Learning

- The importance of formal and informal learning in remaining alert and current
- The critical role of keeping mentally fit and active

4. Good Health

- The critical role of having and maintaining good health and physical well-being

5. Staying Active and Involved in Life

- The importance of having diverse interests and activities
- The critical role of perseverance, persistence and determination
- The importance of having fun

- The importance of maintaining a keen interest in life including the world, society, community, and people
- The importance of challenging themselves to take on different and /or more difficult interests or activities

6. Loss, Carrying On, and Coping with Life's Challenges

- The pivotal role of coping with life's challenges and losses through acceptance, adapting, and openness
- The importance of being aware of, and accepting the possibility of challenges and/or loss, including one's own mortality
- Having the ability not to worry unduly or ruminate or dwell on these challenges and inevitabilities

7. Personal Agency

- The importance of having choices and being able to make their own decisions
- The critical role of having control over one's life
- The importance of having a positive attitude and/or an optimistic outlook on life
- The importance of having a sense of humour
- The ability to be proactive in setting and attaining goals

8. Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things, and Living a Worthwhile Life

- The importance of creating a meaningful and valued life
- The importance of having created meaningful memories
- The importance of being self-reflective
- The ability to live life in the moment
- The critical role of being a giving and generous person

9. Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

- The importance of taking personal responsibility for oneself and one's choices
- The importance of social responsibility and making a positive difference in the lives of others

10. Feeling Fortunate and Grateful

- The ability to feel fortunate and grateful for their lives and all their life experiences

Common Themes Narrative in Living a Vital Life

It is important to note that while the participants in the study all acknowledged the above 10 themes and subthemes as important factors for living vitally in their later years, each participant is unique and expressed these themes from their own life perspective in varying degrees of intensity and profoundness. The themes are presented in no particular order of importance, as this too differed for each participant depending on the circumstances of his or her life. However, the three factors mentioned by all as being critical to sustaining a vital, later life were having good health, satisfying relationships, and being mentally and physically active by having and developing interests. What is abundantly clear from the identified common themes is that for these particular participants, living a vital life is dependent upon the interaction of a diverse number of physical, mental and psychological factors.

Theme One: Good Health

Having and maintaining good health is considered by all the participants in the study to sustain their well-being and play a crucial role in living a vital life. Most, but not all of them, note that they have had excellent health and a lot of energy throughout their lives. However most acknowledge that their energy levels have decreased somewhat in their mid 60s and 70s. The participants reported experiencing a range of health issues in their later years—some being experienced as relatively minor (e.g., deteriorating hearing and vision) while others face significant and potentially life-threatening health challenges (e.g., lung problems, diabetes, and prostate cancer).

Irrespective of the severity of their health challenges, for the most part, the participants view themselves as healthy and spend little time thinking or talking about their health concerns.

They are all aware that, in Elisabeth's words, "having good health enhances and makes it easier to live vitally" and to whatever degree that they can, they all make their health a priority. The participants report they are living healthy lifestyles, eating healthily, and participating in physical activity. Don sums up what the other participants believe when he remarks "by being healthy it makes me feel good. And by being healthy I can do things." Maintaining good health to whatever degree possible, allows each participant to lead a more vital life. They are aware that as they age they need to practice more self-care, including taking time to rest and "smell the roses."

Theme Two: Satisfying Relationships

Satisfying relationships are a deep source from which the participants in the study draw strength for living a meaningful, satisfying and vital life. Participating in close, caring, and supportive relationships with nuclear or extended family members and/or friends is crucial for sustaining their well-being and vitality. Connecting and sharing themselves with others is a significant way these individuals derive meaning for living. They are able to show caring as well as feel cared for by the important people in their lives. Overall, they derive a deep sense of comfort and contentment from being and/or having been a support for their families and/or friends and knowing that family and/or friends are, or will be, available to support them when, and if, necessary. The participants reflected on how they get back from others as much if not more than what they give. They derive a sense of well-being and comfort knowing that they matter to others. However, none of them are, as Clarence and Art point out, "in each other's laps." They have struck a balance of being self-reliant, for the most part, while also enjoying the company and support of others.

Having an active and vital social life and engaging with other people with similar interests is invigorating for all 10 participants. Whether being a "social butterfly" as Margarita describes herself, or being somewhat less social, the individuals echo the belief in the importance

of socializing in sustaining an interesting and vital life. For some, socializing occurs with family as well as friends and acquaintances while, for others, socializing mostly involves friends. What is evident is that all these people have built social lives founded on choosing to be around people who are, like themselves, more positive-minded and with whom they are able to share interests, activities and camaraderie. They actively seek out people who are uplifting rather than energy draining. To lesser or greater degrees the participants are aware of the importance of meeting new people and developing new acquaintances and friendships in order to continue to be lively and engaged. This is especially true because many of their contemporaries are becoming cognitively or physically incapacitated, or have died or are dying.

Theme Three: Staying Active and Involved in Life

Staying active and involved is a lifelong theme considered by all participants to be essential in order to continue living meaningful, interesting and vital lives. Some have been involved in a wide range of activities throughout their lives while others have been developing more diverse activities since retirement. They keep busy, engaged and excited by developing and proactively pursuing a range of interests and activities and tend to keep to a routine regarding some of their activities, especially exercise and/or volunteering. Underlying the participants' proactive stance and active engagement in living are the qualities of perseverance, persistence and determination. The participants also underscored the importance of having fun by choosing activities and experiences they enjoy and being with people who tend to be vital themselves. Jean echoes the sentiments of all the participants when she describes feeling "intensely alive, vibrant and vital" when she is having fun being engaged in meaningful activities.

Maintaining a keen interest in and curiosity about life, including people, community, society and the world, is something the participants believe is necessary for their lives to be vital. They are aware of and interested in happenings locally, province-wide, country-wide and world-

wide through listening to or reading about current events or seeing events first hand by travelling. There is a consensus that having this awareness, interest and curiosity allows them a more profound understanding of the world and its people. These participants see challenging themselves to take the risk of doing different and/or more difficult interests or activities as being central to living vitally. The sense of accomplishment gained from doing things that are not always easy is, as Don says, “energizing.”

Theme Four: Adequate Finances

Having adequate finances is an important component of quality of life and well-being for the 10 participants in the study and thus a necessary contributor to their vital living. Having peace of mind financially frees participants from worrying about financial concerns and enables them to live comfortable lives. Living a comfortable life for these participants is, in part, connected to freedom from having apprehension or unease or fears about not having enough money to do the things they want to do and to take care of themselves. For them, having peace of mind financially is linked to better emotional health which they also consider to be critical for vital living. For example, the ability to pay for certain items associated with aging, such as lenses after cataract surgery or hearing aids, is viewed as a necessary requirement for their continued quality of life which, in turn, nurtures their vitality.

The participants stressed the significance of being able to afford to participate in enjoyable activities, events, or experiences that enhance their interesting, active and vital lives. Without exception, they consider that it is necessary to have enough funds to not just exist but to live lives that are meaningful and interesting and thereby vital. Not having adequate finances would make it difficult to do many of the things that they find productive, satisfying, rewarding, enriching and inspiring—activities that fuel their current vital lives. What constitutes having enough financial resources is very individual and different for each participant, and none view

themselves as living extravagantly. However, they believe they are living vitally, in part, because they have comfortable homes, are able to take care of their health and are able to engage in the things that enrich and make their lives fuller.

Theme Five: Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning, whether formal or informal, is an important contributor to living vital and full lives for all the participants in the study. There is a pervasive sense that, as Jean says, they “can’t ever stop learning.” Continued life learning broadens their experiences and perspectives on life, thereby enhancing and enriching their lives. All the participants had either post secondary education or training and many reported participating in continuing education and/or seminars and workshops. Some went back to university in midlife. Currently they continue to seek out learning in diverse ways including traveling, participating in discussion groups, watching documentaries, playing or listening to music, reading, creating and or building things or listening to, and learning from, other people and their experiences.

The participants have inquisitive and curious minds, and in their eighth and ninth decades they are, in John’s words, “certainly smart about dealing with life.” The participants reflected on how lifelong learning has been, and continues to be, a significant means by which they remain alert and current regarding their communities, society, and the world at large. These vital living individuals are keenly interested in keeping mentally fit, and being on top of what is happening in their communities, and the world at large. They feel energized when their minds are stimulated by keeping connected to current events through watching the news on television or hearing it on the radio or reading about it in the newspaper. The participants believed that being open to learning new and different things is an important facet of mental fitness and contributes greatly to their vitality. Keeping their minds going and their brains active through continued

meaningful learning is an important way in which the participants in the study currently live vital lives.

Theme Six: Carrying On and Coping with Loss and Life Challenges

Carrying on and coping with loss and life challenges are, and have been, a continual part of the participants' lives. In their 70s and 80s the 10 individuals in the study acknowledge and understand the pivotal role of coping with life's challenges and losses through acceptance, adaptation, adjusting to circumstances, and openness. They acknowledge the importance of an accepting attitude in living vitally. Accepting life's losses and coping as best they can with life's challenges removes an emotional weight from their shoulders—freeing up energy to live vitally. With regard to the lessening of physical strength and stamina as they age, all the participants accept that this is a part of aging that requires “taking a different track.” They have learned to accept what they can no longer do and adapt to their changing circumstances by doing what they can do. They tacitly accept that challenge and loss and change are a part of living. The participants recognize and acknowledge that they must continue to work on acceptance in some aspects of their lives. By accepting and adapting to physical limitations and losses due to aging, they continue to live exciting and vital lives. To some degree all the participants have had to reinvent their lives after loss and challenge, whether the long term illness and death of a loved one, the loss of a valued career through retirement, the loss of a relationship through separation or divorce, or the loss of stamina and energy. To greater or lesser degrees these individuals are excited about change and openly acknowledge that adjusting, adapting, and carrying on are necessary and important factors in sustaining their ability to live vitally.

All 10 participants voiced the importance of being aware and accepting of the eventuality of their own mortality. Some state that they do not fear death. They all know it is coming sooner or later and all are clear about not dwelling on their own mortality. They have thought about the

end of their lives but are clearly determined to live well for whatever time they have. They appear to accept death as a part of life and feel that worse than death would be to live their lives unengaged, uninspired and uninvolved. They attempt to live wholeheartedly in the present and continue to look forward to the future. Like Clarence, who was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer, the participants live vitally by “facing up” to their challenges. They deal with loss and the reality of their mortality by living their current lives as fully as possible.

Theme Seven: Personal Agency

Having personal agency is very instrumental for all the participants in ensuring that they continue to live satisfactory and vital lives. Having choices and being able to make their own decisions about where they are going to “invest” their “energy” are potent ways for the participants to feel empowered and live full and meaningful lives. The participants underscored the critical importance of being able to decide how, and where, they live the lives they value.

A positive attitude and optimistic outlook—not seeing themselves as victims—was also viewed by the participants as a significant aspect of feeling in control of their lives. They generally are able to see, in John’s words, “the bright side of things,” which is a deep source from which they draw empowerment. Being positive and optimistic significantly adds to these individuals’ love of life and excitement for living, sparking their energy and enriching their vital lives. As Jean notes, “not being weighed down by negative feelings” frees them to feel more energetic and live more vitally. Having a sense of humour is another empowering element that contributes to a vital life for these participants. Being able to laugh at themselves and others, noting and chuckling over life’s vagaries and unpredictability, and seeing the funny side of things is uplifting for them and enhances their well-being and energy.

Being proactive in setting and attaining goals is another way these individuals continue to have personal agency. By setting goals and taking the necessary steps to achieve them, all of the

participants feel their lives are more empowered, more meaningful and more alive. They try to give their best effort to achieve the goals they set and when they do achieve them they feel immense satisfaction and a sense of personal strength and control. Setting goals is a motivating force for the participants and in Elisabeth's words, "a way to get on" with things and live with zest.

Theme Eight: Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things, and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life are themes the participants believe imbue their lives with meaning and energy and make it possible to, as John says, "treasure every day." The participants in the study believe they have created valued lives and that living lives that they value is intricately connected to living vitally. They all have a love or a passion for something—whether connecting with others, adventure travelling, hiking, tennis, participating in a group or society, playing a musical instrument or reading—which they enjoy tremendously and look forward to doing. Henry sums up what these individuals believe when he reflects that "living a purposeful and worthwhile life is the whole point of being."

For all the participants there is a perception of every day being, in Elisabeth's words, "a new beginning"—of waking up and looking forward to every day as having the potential to be new and wonderful and life-affirming. Having positive and meaningful memories, many of which were self-created, enrich and vitalize the individuals' lives and remind them that their lives have meaning and have been lived well. The joy, comfort and sense of accomplishment and/or peace derived from having a store of good memories from which to draw upon in their eighth and ninth decades appear to sustain the well-being and liveliness of these men and women. Being self-reflective and/or examining their life is important for all the participants and supports their sense of continued growth and satisfaction. Through self-reflection and self-examination, the participants find they have developed a deeper understanding of others, life in

general, and the process of change, all things that enhance and enrich their belief that their lives have been, and continue to be, worthwhile.

The ability to live in the moment—at times spontaneously—whether hiking, walking, gardening, starting conversations with strangers, or participating in sports or playing music, revitalizes and animates these individuals. For Art living in the moment is the simplicity of spontaneously jumping off a curb and feeling “good” and “vital.” Being spontaneous, living in the moment, letting go of having to always arrange or plan everything is one way the participants derive enjoyment and zest for life. The individuals in the study also see their lives as purposeful and worthwhile in some part because they feel they are giving and generous people. Giving of themselves and being supportive to others, by sharing interests, time, energy, knowledge, caring or finances, is extremely satisfying for these men and women and a rich source of vitality as they grow older.

Theme Nine: Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

The participants in the study are very responsible individuals. Being responsible both personally and socially is closely connected to living their lives in meaningful ways which nurtures their energy and fuels their vital living. These older adults understand the importance of taking responsibility for themselves, including their physical and emotional health and well-being, their choices and actions, and attiring and presenting themselves well. These men and women thrive on being responsible people. The participants who are married or have partners tend to “share” responsibility with each other. They all feel that they have taken responsibility for having created, and for continuing to create, a life that is important and meaningful and vital for them.

In part the individuals in the study credit their sense of well-being, life satisfaction and vitality to recognizing the importance of social responsibility—taking the requisite action and

making a positive difference in the lives of others. They see themselves as caring people. This ethic of caring has been rewarded throughout their lives and contributes to the participants feeling their lives are meaningful, productive and vital. Most of them have volunteered, especially after retirement from their careers, and continue to do volunteer work that they believe is worthwhile and positive and enhances the lives of others. Helping others is an important way the participants have felt and continue to feel they are making a difference, and that makes them feel good about themselves and their lives. Feeling they are making a positive difference in people's lives provides a deeper level of meaning to their lives, is hopeful, and makes their lives more vital.

Theme Ten: Feeling Fortunate and Grateful

The 10 participants in the study often voiced how fortunate and grateful they feel for their lives and all their life experiences, past and present. They are grateful to be alive and feel they have so much to be thankful for. They used the following words and phrases: "I feel that I'm very, very blessed," "I feel very lucky," "I'm thankful," and "I feel appreciative." They do not take their lives or what they perceive as their good fortune for granted. They acknowledge the importance of gratitude as nurturing their well-being and vitality, and appear to consciously live their lives from a perspective of feeling grateful for their lives and experiences.

All of the participants expressed gratitude for good health, strength and vitality, alert minds, family, friends, opportunities for continued learning, good memories, adequate finances, and comfortable lives—things they believe make their lives meaningful and full. The women and men in this study expressed gratitude for their careers, their ability to help others, their spirituality and/or Christianity, a good medical system, the ability to travel, inspirational mentors, the memories that live within them, and their values and principles. All of them feel fortunate that they have learned from their experiences, both positive and negative. The majority

of the participants expressed gratitude even for the more difficult and more challenging experiences in their lives, feeling these experiences helped build their character. They are grateful for the opportunities still available to them and for being able to continue to feel wonderment and excitement and passion.

Validation Interviews

In order to help minimize my influence on the results, the participants reviewed their individual narratives and the common themes narrative and confirmed their accuracy and comprehensiveness and that they resonated with their experiences of living vitally. They noted that they enjoyed participating in the research process and found it to be a positive and interesting experience. Some of the participants reported reflecting on their lives and how they lived fully and vitally in a deeper way than they ever had previously. Some examples of the personal insights garnered by the participants after reading the common themes narrative included feeling a connection with all the vital living participants in the study, being more thoughtful or planful about living a vital life, realizing how fortunate their lives have been and continue to be, becoming more aware that everyone has challenges in their lives that need to be faced and dealt with, feeling good to give back, realizing good and not so good things about themselves and wanting to evolve further, reassessing and changing some priorities to make life simpler, and realizing the need for more mental stimulation. Some of the ways the participants perceived the common themes narrative had the potential to be helpful for older adults included: providing encouragement and hope that vital and full living is possible by showing how vital people age well and cope with life; inspiring people who want to live vitally to create lives that they value and that are exciting; highlighting the importance of being active mentally and/or physically, socially engaged, and socially responsible; and emphasizing that living vitally requires motivation and effort every day.

Three outside peer reviewers—two men and one woman—who were Caucasian, aged 75 to 81 years, and who self-defined as living vital lives, added a fresh perspective to the research process. All three peer reviewers had originally expressed an interest in being participants in the study. The youngest individual was 75 years old and was married to one of the participants in the study. He left school after grade nine and did an electrical apprenticeship, including four years of night school. Eventually he became an electrical instructor at a technical college in the Lower Mainland, and he still instructs there part time. He described his SES as being comfortable and his health as being good. The peer reviewer who was 78 years old was retired from the Coast Guard. He was a widower with two daughters and grandchildren with whom he said he had a close and supportive relationship. He said that he enjoyed the company of two ladies who were much younger than him but had no intention of remarrying. He described himself as being actively engaged in outdoor activities such as canoeing, camping, and hiking. As well, he said he enjoyed photography and adventure travelling in other countries. He described his SES as being reasonably comfortable and his health as being excellent. The third peer reviewer was a female, aged 81 years and had been a participant in my master's research study. She was retired from being a tour guide on a tour bus. She had been divorced for over 30 years and was the mother of two sons and 10 grandchildren whom she felt supported by and whom she cared for deeply. She described herself as being a good friend and deriving a lot of vitality from caring for and being cared for by others. Art is her passion and she is involved in a painting and drawing class throughout the year. As well, she said she derives a lot of satisfaction and vitality from helping her friends by driving them to doctors' appointments, the airport, and for coffee and lunches. She also spends three mornings a week as a companion to an older friend. She described her SES as being a fixed income (poor). Her health was significantly compromised by diabetes, obesity, chronic lung issues, and stenosis of the spine.

I met with each of the peer reviewers and gave them a copy of the written common themes narrative, as well as the guide questions for the validation interview of the common themes narrative. They were given up to two weeks to review the narrative and reflect on the guide questions. Each participant then contacted me to arrange a validation interview of the common themes narrative. Each validation interview took approximately 60 minutes. During the interview, I asked the peer reviewers a number of questions about the coherence, comprehensiveness, resonance, and pragmatic value of the common themes narrative in living vitally in later life. All three of the peer reviewers supported the trustworthiness of the themes of living a vital later life by confirming the validity of the common themes narrative. They all said that the common themes narrative was coherent (the findings were understandable), comprehensive (the findings were detailed and contained enough content), and resonated with them (given their expertise on vital living in later life, the findings captured how they lived vital lives). As well, the peer reviewers stated that the common themes narrative had pragmatic value (they noted the insights that the narrative provided them, commented on how the narrative could provide assistance to older adults wanting to live more vital lives, and stated ways in which practitioners could use the narrative to assist older, less vital living adults). For example, they noted that the common narrative was reassuring and comforting for them because it clarified and captured how they also live vitally and cope with challenges, showed that there are many factors besides adequate health and finances that interact and are important for a vital life, caused conscious reflection about what constitutes living vitally, and clarified how important having a proactive approach to challenges in life is for a well-lived later life. As well, the peer reviewers reported that the common narrative may provide hope and assistance to older adults wanting to live vital lives by providing a framework of factors that constitute vital living and might provide

the “spark” to move people to be more proactive to do things that increase their vital engagement in life.

Three expert reviewers—two psychologists and the executive director of a senior’s centre—confirmed the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the content and reported that in their opinion the common themes narrative was an accurate reflection of vital living later life individuals’ experiences. Some of the insights they reported gaining from the common narrative included one or more of the following: the importance of feeling fortunate and grateful; learning that not all of the vital living adults were married or partnered; finding out that not all the participants had postsecondary educations; the importance of being open to adapting and adjusting to life circumstances, challenges and losses; having passion for something; the need for some balance between structure and routine and spontaneity and living in the moment; and, that vital living takes effort and work every day. Two of the expert reviewers commented that the depth of the common narrative added to their understanding of vital living in later life. Some examples of the ways the expert reviewers perceived the common narrative as potentially providing assistance to older adults wanting to live a vital way included: recognition that living a vital life requires work and effort; living a vital life is holistic in that there are potentially at least 10 factors (10 common themes) that can be worked on; and, providing hope for people that they can live more vitally if they chose to. Some examples of ways in which the expert reviewers thought the common narrative could potentially be used by counselors and/or practitioners to assist older adults to live more fully and vitally included: being aware of the 10 common themes, understanding the importance of their interaction, and using them as a framework for counselling; being aware that vital living requires effort; being aware that coming to acceptance is a process that vital living older adults are working on and learning to do; being more aware of and empathic with older adults around their need for personal agency and empowerment;

understanding that older adults can be passionate about things; being aware of the importance of social engagement and connection; having the common themes and subthemes incorporated in educational and/or psycho-educational programs, groups, workshops and/or seminars for both professionals and non-vital living older adults; and, incorporating the common themes and subthemes into groups for retirees, or about to retire adults, as preparation for living vitally as they age.

Personal Reflections

Having completed seven of the ten individual narrative validation interviews, I reflected:

As far as the validation interviews are going, they have been quite a revelation to me. I am surprised at the level of emotion that I have felt in revisiting the participants. For the most part, this stage of the process has been very moving for me. Also, most of the participants have been quite emotional (in a positive way) about their narratives and so far they have all expressed feeling that their narratives, while being accurate regarding content are a bit embarrassing because they are so positive. A number of the participants have expressed gratitude (not surprising, as they all have the characteristic of “gratitude”) because, in being interviewed, reflecting on their

lives and reading their narratives they have either come to terms with some issues, made some changes in their lives, and/or have come to some realizations about themselves or their lives or experiences that have been comforting and meaningful for them.

While arranging to drop off the common themes narrative for each participant and then dropping off the narrative, I reflected on some of my impressions and feelings:

When I phoned the participants to arrange for the final validation interview, I was concerned some of them would find this continued process annoying, or even a nuisance. I was pleasantly surprised to talk to each participant and find them willing—at times eager—to read the common narrative and answer the validation/rigor questions. I was very happy to hear that they were all continuing to do well. They certainly sounded vigorous and vital on the phone! It was heart-warming for me to hear their voices. And when I dropped off the narratives and saw them in person, it was such a good feeling to see them getting on with their lives—engaged in living vitally. One of the participants was just getting ready to bike to the hospital to see his wife. Another participant had recently married his partner of 10 years. A third participant had visited the “Holy Land” since our previous interview. I cannot help but be amazed and inspired by these wonderful people.

When all the validation interviews were finally completed I found myself thinking about the impact that the research process has had on me and what I would be taking with me besides a completed dissertation:

I have been privy to 10 stories of vital living told by 10 storytellers living in their eighth and ninth decades. I have laughed so hard together with them. At times, I have shed tears together with them. For me, there was a sense of the sacred as I sat close by listening to their stories unfold. To be in the presence of women and men who have lived and continue to live interesting, challenging, and brave lives in their 70s and 80s is both hopeful and inspiring. Over and over again, 10 storytellers reminded me of the power of stories and their potential to impact lives. I have listened and have been inspired to make important changes in my own life.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The research question posed in this study was: *How do men and women seventy years and older narrate and understand the experience of being vitally engaged in living?* The focus of this chapter is to address the significance of the research findings, comparing them to the literature discussed in Chapter Two. Implications for counselling practice and future research will be discussed. Limitations of the study will also be addressed.

Theoretical Implications

The present research findings identify the common themes in living a vital life for 10 men and women between 69 and 85 years of age. The findings support and/or potentially add to the psychological literature on three fronts: the developmental issues, challenges, and tasks during the stage of late adulthood; the research on successful aging and later life well-being and satisfaction; and, the research on vital living and later life. The women and men in the current study defined vital living in later life as *having good enough health, satisfying relationships, adaptive coping skills, love of learning, personal agency (choices and decision-making), a sense of purpose and meaning, adequate finances, feeling grateful and fortunate, being personally and socially responsible, and staying active and involved*. These personal and situational resources have been described by a number of theorists and researchers as being important for late life growth and development, creative aging, well-being, and meaning-making (e.g., Bassett et al., 2007; Carlsen, 1991; Depp & Jeste, 2006; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Fry, 2000; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Levinson, 1978; Meeks & Murrell, 2001; Nygren et al., 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997; Ryff, 1989a; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Steverink et al., 2001; Vaillant, 2002).

The findings from the current study on vital living in later life support its theoretical framework of positive psychology and are consistent with some authors' and researchers' (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Steen,

Park & Peterson, 2005) notions that perceived age is more important than chronological age, generativity is indicative of aging well, and certain dispositional strengths—optimism, lifelong learning and knowledge, gratitude, determination, and spirituality—are related to positive mental health and well-being for older adults. The results from the current study are consistent with the findings of Baltes and Baltes (1998) and Vaillant (2002) that a person's psychological, biological and/or social age are more accurate determinants of whether or not older adults are living vitally than their chronological age. The participants in this study all believed they were living vital lives in large part because they enjoyed relatively good mental and physical health, were able—within limits—to do the activities they enjoyed, they had satisfying relationships, and they lived meaningful lives. While they were aware of their chronological ages, the vital living older adults in this study reported that they did not view or perceive themselves as being old. Even the participants in the current study who were 80 years and older reported feeling content with their lives and perceived themselves as being physically vigorous for their age, emotionally healthy, lively, and vital. For the participants in this study, the common themes and subthemes elucidated in the common narrative appeared to be far more important indicators of vital living than chronological age.

Proponents of positive psychology (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001; Peterson & Park, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) view generativity—a “willingness to give back cross-generationally” (Leider & Shapiro, 2008, p. 19)—as an important aspect of what makes life worth living. Consistent with this contention, the women and men in the current study demonstrated a “spirit of generativity” (Leider & Shapiro, p. 19) at this stage of their lives, by sharing their knowledge and expertise with others and supporting their family members and friends emotionally and/or financially. Giving back to others and nurturing the younger generations was a value shared by all the participants, and enacted to varying degrees in their

lives. This is consistent with Erikson and Erikson's (1997) concept of maintaining a grand-generative function, which Levinson (1978, 1996) and Vaillant (2002) also identified as a major task of late adulthood psychosocial development.

The participants in the current study demonstrated social responsibility—another important aspect of generativity—by being involved with their neighbourhoods and/or communities, often through formal or informal volunteering. According to Vaillant (2002), psychologically healthy and happy older adults are wise and just teachers of the past in meaningful ways, in part because they have a widening social radius that extends beyond their immediate communities. The women and men in the current study, to lesser or greater degrees, felt a responsibility to both their peers and the younger generations to live full and vital lives, to make a difference in the lives of others, and to leave the world a better place. They perceived themselves to be conscientious citizens who were concerned for a social world that extends far beyond their families, friends, and communities. They reported deriving deeper meaning in life, a broader understanding of the world and its people, and a more profound understanding of themselves through this concern—tasks Erikson et al. (1986) reported as being critical for vital living in later adulthood.

The vital living men and women in the current study acknowledged having a number of what Peterson and Seligman (2004) call dispositional strengths including optimism, a passion for lifelong learning and knowledge, a positive and determined nature, and a sense of spirituality. Fredrickson (2001), Peterson and Seligman, and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have identified these dispositional strengths as life-enhancing and indicative of individuals who are experiencing positive mental health. The self-defining vital participants in the current study certainly considered themselves to be hopeful, and have positive attitudes and optimistic

outlooks on life. In their view, not being weighed down by negativity freed them to live more vitally.

Consistent with the findings of a number of theorists and researchers (e.g., Depp & Jeste, 2006; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Minicuci et al., 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001), life-long learning (formal or informal), knowledge, and maintaining mental acuity were also reported by the men and women in the current study as important for their lives to be full and vital. These men and women reported being open to new ideas and experiences, something Carlsen (1991) found to be critical for constructive thinking and predictive of individuals who age creatively and vitally. Consistent with the findings of Knight and Ricciardelli (2003), Meeks et al. (2001), and Ryff (1989a), the participants' ability to feel fortunate and grateful for their lives, and learn from both their positive and negative experiences, appeared to contribute significantly to their sense of well-being and vitality.

The women and men in the current study described themselves as determined and persistent and noted that these qualities helped them to carry on, see things through, and achieve their goals. Bassett et al. (2007), Nygren et al. (2005) and Ranzijn (2002) found determination and persistence to be indicative of positive psychological and physical health in later life and predictive of older adults' realizing their potential. Determination and persistence are also strengths inherent in Erikson et al.'s (1986) conceptualization of vital living older adults and were found by other theorists and researchers (e.g., Baltes, 2003; Baltes and Carstensen, 2003; Erikson and Erikson 1997; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi; and Vaillant, 2002) to be predictive of aging well and/or vitally.

Spirituality was identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Crowther et al. (2002), as being important for mental health. Nine of the ten older adults in this study reported that their connection to spirituality was a deep source from which they drew vitality.

Contrary to Rowe and Kahn's (1987; 1997) and Ryan and Frederick's (1997) assertions that the absence of disease and somatic problems are necessary for aging well, the men and women in the current study perceived themselves as aging well and having vital lives even though some had or were experiencing chronic, and in some cases, life-threatening and debilitating health problems including cancer, kidney failure, heart problems, high blood pressure, arthritis, and respiratory issues. Even the participant with the most significantly compromised health reported feeling deeply alive and described herself as vital. Consistent with Vaillant and Mukamal's (2001) conceptualization of successful aging and Depp and Jeste's (2006) findings from their review of the literature on successful aging, irrespective of their health challenges, the vital living men and women in the current study said they did not dwell on their health issues. Similar to the older participants in the study by Penninx et al. (1998), perhaps the love and support they felt they received from family members and friends, contributed to the participants' ability to sustain emotional vitality in the face of these health challenges.

Being planful and involved in activities have also been reported to be important predictors of aging well and vitality (e.g., Depp & Jeste, 2006; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Minicuci et al., 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001). Certainly the participants in the current study were engaged in diverse activities and arranged and organized most aspects of their lives. They planned for and were all engaged in what they considered to be interesting, enjoyable, and meaningful activities, but not, in their view, always productive activities. This particular finding differs from Rowe and Kahn's suggestion that successful aging in later life requires that activities be productive. The women and men in the current study reported that the activities that fuelled their vitality needed first and foremost to be personally rewarding and meaningful to them and to make use of their talents or knowledge or experience. It was the challenge of mastering new and difficult activities such as snow shoeing or playing the

piano or constructing a chair or hiking a new mountain or doing parcour or dog sledding, that contributed to a vital life for several of the participants in this study.

The findings from the current study provide support for what many theorists and researchers (e.g., Carlsen, 1991; Crowther et al., 2002; Depp & Jeste, 2006; Erikson et al., 1986; Kasser & Ryan, 1999; Ranzijn, 2002; Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Stanford, 2006; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001) have found—individuals who age well and/or vitally appear to have adaptive coping styles. The men and women in the current study reported carrying on and coping with life in the face of a wide range of losses and challenges. They noted they tended more and more to respond positively to the challenges and losses inherent in living into their 70s and 80s. These individuals perceived themselves to be in the process of learning to accept their entire lives and experiences—positive and negative—and life in general, something Erikson and Erikson (1997) and Erikson et al. found to indicate vital living and be a necessary process for later life psychosocial development. According to the women and men in the current study, being more accepting of the challenges and losses inherent in the aging process, other people, and life, in general, unburdened them of feelings of negativity and freed up more energy for them to live vitally. However, most of the participants acknowledged that acceptance of some of the losses and health challenges they faced was not always easy.

Consistent with Kasser and Ryan's (1999) finding that psychological health is a predictor of subjective vitality, the women and men in the current study viewed themselves as being psychologically healthy. While they acknowledged having at times felt sad or worried or depressed, they reported that they had learned over a lifetime how to cope with loss and not remain down for long. These participants perceived themselves as being able to face, and even learn and grow from the significant challenges and losses they experienced in their lives. Carlsen (1991) and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) found this ability to rebound from adversity—

what they viewed as resilience—to be an important indicator of psychological health in adulthood. In order to cope with the challenges inherent in the aging process the participants reported taking responsibility for their physical and emotional well-being—something that has consistently been reported as being predictive of well-being in later life (e.g., Erikson et al., 1986; Minicuci et al. 2005; Ranzijn, 2002; Vaillant, 2002).

Consistent with the findings of Baltes (2003) and Baltes and Carstensen (2003) regarding adaptive aging, the current study's participants reported learning to adapt, adjust and change in order to achieve their goals and continue to live vital lives. Most of them acknowledged that while they had to change certain aspects of themselves and/or their lives in the face of significant challenges or losses, they were also often excited and energized by the change process. The findings suggest that the participants were engaged in what Baltes and Baltes and Carstensen describe as selection (becoming more discerning about which activities to expend time and energy), optimization (developing increased functional abilities through learning, practicing, and experiencing), and compensation (employing conscious effort to moderate the limitations and losses in functional ability that are tied to the aging process). The participants who were in their later 70s and 80s and had more significant health challenges appeared to rely more on the Selection and Optimization with Compensation process to sustain vital living.

The participants in the current study appeared to be in the process of facing, coming to terms with, and making peace with their own mortality—considered by many developmental theorists to be a major developmental task in later life (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Erikson et al., 1986; Langle, 2001; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001). According to Erikson and Erikson, the attainment of wisdom—another important task of later life—is only possible through making peace with one's mortality. Baltes and Baltes (1990), Erikson and Erikson, Levinson, and Vaillant (2002) have described wise older adults as being mindful, continuing to

build and sustain considerate and insightful relationships, and continuing to adapt and be open to change. These are qualities the participants in the current study perceived they had or were working on—qualities they also viewed as being important for vital living. The findings from this study are consistent with Erikson and Erikson, Langle, Levinson (1978) and Vaillant's notion that in late adulthood individuals need to find a way to focus more inwardly—by being more spiritual and contemplative—to face and accept uncertainty and to protect themselves from being overwhelmed by the substantial losses of old age. To varying degrees, the women and men in the current study perceived themselves as more reflective and spiritual, practices they acknowledge have helped them find more strength to face what is unknown.

The women and men in the current study reported that they did not view themselves as victims of aging—instead they generally viewed aging as an interesting part of life in general. This may be because these individuals perceived themselves as being in control of their lives, having choices, and making decisions about what mattered to them. These findings are consistent with Fry's (2000) and Ryff and Keyes' (1995) conclusions that feeling a sense of self-determination, autonomy and empowerment are predictive of well-being in later life. The participants in the current study reported living fully and vitally in part because they were relatively independent, had choices, and were able to make decisions about how they lived their lives. This is consistent with having a sense of self-determination (Ryff & Keyes). These aspects of agency were found by Kasser and Ryan (1999) to be indicative of people experiencing subjective vitality and by Erikson and Erikson (1997) and Vaillant (2002) to predict adaptive psychosocial development in later life. Consistent with the findings of many researchers and theorists (e.g., Bassett, Bourbonnais & McDowell, 2007; Crowther et al., 2002; Erikson & Erikson; Fry, 2000; Kasser & Ryan; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Murrell, Salsman & Meeks, 2003; Nygren et al., 2005; Pennix et. al., 1998; Ranzijn, 2002; Ryan & Frederick, 1997;

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Stanford, 2006; Vaillant), the participants in the current study perceived themselves as able to set and attain meaningful goals—no matter how small or large—in order to live well and vitally. As well they perceived themselves as being capable and effective people, which Erikson et al. (1986) suggested is a critical resource for vitality in later life.

The attainment of integrity—making sense of one’s life by viewing it as coherent, whole, meaningful, and valuable is considered by many to be a primary psychosocial developmental task of late adulthood (Carlsen, 1991; Erikson, 1987; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Langle, 2001; Levinson, 1978; Nygren et al., 2005; Ranzijn, 2002; Vaillant, 2002). These theorists and researchers suggest that a sense of integrity can only be achieved through self-reflection/self-examination, continual learning, and opening up one’s mind and heart. The 10 women and men in the current study perceive themselves—to greater or lesser degrees—as being in a process of examining and reflecting on their lives and their selves, continually learning, and opening their minds to more diverse ideas and their hearts to different experiences and people. Consistent with the findings of a number of prominent researchers in the field (Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Carstensen, 2003; Battista & Almond, 1973; Carlsen; the Eriksons; Erikson et al., 1986; Friedan, 1993; Frankl, 1959; Langle; Levinson; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Taakinen & Ruoppila, 2001; Vaillant) regarding adaptive functioning in old age, the women and men in the current study viewed themselves as being engaged in an ongoing process of reflecting on, and examining the meaning of their lives—past, present, and future—and concluding that overall, their lives have been and continue to be, valuable and worthwhile. They acknowledged that they have made mistakes, but they reported that generally their regrets are few.

The results of the current study also concur with the contention that late adulthood has the potential to be as interesting, unique, purposeful, fulfilling, and worthwhile as the previous

life stages (Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Cartensen, 2003; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Friedan, 1993; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Vaillant, 2002). The participants in the current study voiced how satisfying their current lives were with some claiming that their lives are more satisfying now than when they were younger. This may be due to what Ranzijn (2002) and Van Tilburg (1998) found as predictive of life satisfaction for older adults—freedom from raising families or being involved in careers, deep appreciation and gratitude for their lives, respect for their life experiences, and viewing themselves as capable members of society. The participants in this study spoke of the importance of having positive and meaningful memories to remind them that their lives have been and continue to be worthwhile—a finding that is also consistent with Ranzijn’s conclusion that having good and meaningful memories supports older adults in terms of aging well.

Carlsen (1991) suggests that mindfulness and spontaneity enhance meaningful, unique, creative, and vital aging. Certainly this applies to the lives of the men and women in this study who viewed their lives as being purposeful, interesting and vital, in part because they were fully present (mindful), aware of their feelings, thoughts, passions and memories and, at times, spontaneous. Levinson (1978) postulated that a major developmental task of late adulthood involves creating a new balance of engagement with self and society and that older adults could attain this balance and live more interesting, purposeful and worthwhile lives by recreating their “self-in-world” (p. 36). To varying degrees, the participants in the current study perceived themselves to be living purposeful, interesting and, at times, exciting lives by re-creating their lives in novel, and in many cases, creative ways.

There are a number of ways in which the current study extends or adds to what is in the literature on aging well and vitally. The current study adds to Levinson’s (1996) notion of *adolescing* by providing more information about what positive growth (the 10 themes and

subthemes that make up the common narrative) looks like for vital living older adults. However, in contrast to Levinson's postulation that older adults also experience negative growth and decay that is ubiquitous, the participants in the current study, while acknowledging physical limitations/losses or in the case of the youngest participant significant health challenges, did not use the words decline or decay to describe their experience of aging and did not view themselves as being in decline or decay. Perhaps this was in part due to only one participant having reached the age of 85 years. The current findings are more consistent with the notions proposed by Rowe and Kahn (1987; 1997) that later life is not mostly a time of diminishing physical, psychological, and social functioning and that older adults are not doomed to declining health and functioning.

The findings from the current study are also somewhat different from Steverink and his colleagues' (2001) postulation that physical loss in later life appears to include overall loss of health and vitality. The majority of women and men in the current study perceived physical loss to include aches and pains, less endurance, and less strength rather than a loss of health and vitality. Overall, they viewed themselves as doing well and being happy—similar to what Stanford (2006) described as thriving in later life. As well, in contrast to Minicuci et al.'s (2005) finding that being “young old” and male was a predictor of vitality in later life, both female and male participants in the current study were engaged in very vital lives in their 70s and 80s. While the oldest male participants (80+ years of age) challenged themselves the most physically (e.g., mountain hiking, snow-shoeing, biking, running-walking, adventure travelling), all of the participants reported being engaged in some physical activity and underscored the importance of physical activity in terms of dealing with the aging process.

There are many findings in the literature that speak to the importance of close and satisfying relationships as critical predictors of aging well (e.g., Depp & Jeste, 2006; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Kasser & Ryan, 1999; Minicuci et al., 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997; Ryff

& Keyes, 1995; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001). Consistent with this contention, the men and women in the current study reported enjoying close, satisfying, and meaningful relationships with others—whether family members and/or friends. What was critically important to the participants was reciprocity—that they cared about others and that others cared about them. Interestingly, the extent to which the family was the most important source of caring and coping and thus vital living varied considerably for the participants in this study. For many of them, family was a major source of caring, coping and vital living. For others, connection with friends/acquaintances and having rich social lives were viewed as deeper sources of caring and as being more important in coping with the challenges of this life stage.

Similar to the findings of Steverink et al.'s (2001) investigation on well-being and aging, the partnered participants in the current study generally reported having rich social lives whether with family or friends and/or family—even those who were single (never married, divorced, or widowed) perceived themselves to have full social lives. These 10 vital living older adults sought social engagement, especially with people who like them live vital lives, share their interests, and are perceived as being uplifting. What appears to be missing from the literature, and considered by the participants to extend and enhance their social network and social engagement, and be important sources for vital living, is meeting new people, and developing new acquaintances and friendships as their friends and acquaintances have passed on or become cognitively or physically impaired.

The participants also underscored the importance of having routines to help structure their lives after retirement (e.g., exercise, volunteering, daily walks, orchestra/music practice, and/or sports and creative activities). They noted that having a routine encouraged them to get out of bed and look forward to the day. Some of these routines, such as music practice, were

central in giving their lives meaning and pleasure. The importance of maintaining routines for vital living in later life is something that has not yet been addressed in the available literature.

While humour has been identified in the literature as contributing to well-being and aging well (Bassett & Boubonnais, 2007; Ruch et al., 2010), participants in the current study identified humour as a critical factor in coping with the realities of the aging process. Laughing at themselves and others, chuckling over life's vagaries, and generally being able to see the funny side of things was seen as a tremendous resource for vitality in their lives. Participants also underscored the important role having fun and choosing to engage in fun activities—such as dancing or playing music—played in contributing to a vital life, a finding that is not generally associated with older adulthood in our North American culture and one that is not currently reflected in the literature on later life.

According to the literature, education and socioeconomic status are important predictors of living well and vitality in later adulthood (e.g., Minicuci et al., 2005; Murrell, Salsman and Meeks, 2003; Vaillant and Mukamal, 2001). Two of the participants in the current study had no post secondary education yet reported having rich and fulfilling lives. Also, while all participants in the study underscored the importance of having enough money to be able to live comfortable lives without fear of running out of money, the participants varied considerably in terms of their socioeconomic status from lower middle class to wealthy, and consequently had different perceptions of what constituted “enough” money. Because none of the participants were living in poverty it is difficult to know the extent to which this finding supports the conclusion of Vaillant and Mukamal that if individuals reach the age of 75 years, aging well generally appears to surmount social class effects.

The following four findings from the current study that were reported by the participants as contributing to their perceptions of themselves as capable and autonomous individuals who are living purposeful and worthwhile lives, appear to be missing from the literature:

- having something to look forward to every day—whether as simple as having a cup of coffee and reading the paper in the morning or as complicated as planning an adventure trip to India
- appreciating, or for some, cherishing, every day
- having a love or passion for something or someone
- no longer needing or relying on external validation

Contrary to Fry's (2000) findings on the importance of external validation in older adulthood, the majority of the participants in the current study appeared to have a strong sense of internal validation.

Implications for Counselling

The potential relevance of this study for the practice of counselling results in part from its focus on a topic of research which is scarce in the literature, namely vital living in later life. All the participants in the current study acknowledged that it felt good to tell their stories and they found the research process interesting and enjoyable. Furthermore, during the process of research, most of the participants, peer reviewers, and expert reviewers said they gained some awareness or insight from the interview process and/or from reading the findings. Most of the participants and peer reviewers stated that they had never consciously thought about living vitally and that through their participation in the study—especially reading and reflecting on the individual and common themes narratives—it was clarified for them what it looks like and means to live vitally, and how they can continue to live vitally. Most of the participants said they felt reassured, comforted and connected to the other participants by a like-mindedness or

common ground reflected in the common themes. The research process appears to have been cathartic for some of the participants. A number of the participants noted that after reading the individual and common narratives they felt reassured to know that others who feel they are living rich and vital lives also live with challenges and losses. They felt validated to know that they are not alone in facing such challenges at this life stage, and were reassured in their ability to handle these challenges and losses. Some individuals noted that the research process helped them resolve a certain issue that had been troubling them for some time, put the issue into a more manageable or positive context, let go of a hurt or expectations, feel more self-acceptance, or feel more reassured that any mistake made in the past was based on wanting the best for someone. If these self-defining vital living older adults were able to reap such benefits from telling their stories and reflecting on living vitally, it is possible that older adults struggling to develop, grow, and live vitally might also benefit from the opportunity to share their experiences and stories with someone who is keen to hear their perspectives with curiosity and without judgment.

A number of authors and researchers (e.g., Rainsford, 2002; Schlossberg, 1990; Klap, Unroe & Unutzer, 2003; Qualls et al., 2002; Woolfe & Biggs, 1997) have found that, despite the multiple losses and changes with which they must cope at this life stage, many older adults do not have access to the psychological help that is typically available to younger adults. Perhaps this is because many health care professionals and social workers do not perceive counselling older adults as being beneficial, and those who do work with this population often lack the necessary training in geropsychology. Contrary to these beliefs, having undertaken a systematic review of the research evidence relating to counselling older people, Hill and Brett (2005) concluded that “counselling is efficacious with older people” (p. 1). Indeed the benefits of groups for supporting older adults and helping them traverse the aging process has been well

documented in the literature (e.g., Henderson & Gladding, 2004; Schwiebert & Myers, 2001; Schlossberg, 1990; Thomas & Martin, 1992; Hill, Thorn & Packard, 2008; Vacha-Haase, Ness, Dannison & Smith, 2000).

There is also considerable support in the literature (e.g., Butler, 1963; DeVries, Birren & Deutchman, 1990; Ebersole, 1978; Garland & Garland, 2001; Haight & Burnside, 1993; Henderson & Gladding, 2004; Lewis & Butler, 1984; McDougall, Blixen; & Suen, 1997) for using life review—bringing to consciousness memories and unresolved past regrets or conflicts for re-evaluation and resolution—as a therapeutic technique with older adults. The fact that the participants in the current study found it helpful to “tell their stories” of vital living in later life suggests that this type of approach (i.e., life review) might be a useful vehicle for those working with older adults. Haight and Burnside noted that life review is effective both in groups and in private with only the counsellor listening to the client’s life experiences. Certainly most of the self-defining vital participants in the current study said that, to varying degrees, they had benefitted from sharing their experiences and stories in private with only me—the researcher—present.

Topic-specific psycho-educational, preventative or support groups (e.g., spirituality, health, loss, coping, Alzheimer’s) have been found by a number of authors (e.g. Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987; Schuster, 1998; Thomas and Martin, 1997; Vacha-Haase et al., 2000; Weisman and Schwartz, 1989) to provide support and improve quality of life for later life adults who are facing life crises or whose loved ones are. For example, two of the participants reported that they had received a lot of education about, and support for, coping with family members with Alzheimer’s from either participating in or facilitating Alzheimer’s groups. In their meta-analysis of 37 independent studies of the positive effects of volunteering for both older volunteers and the vulnerable (e.g., nursing home residents) individuals they serve,

Wheeler, Gorey and Greenblatt (1998) found that both the volunteers' and their clients' sense of well-being is enhanced significantly. The fact that the majority of the women and men in the current study spoke of how important it was to their sense of living a full and vital life to give back to society and make a difference through what they perceived as meaningful volunteering including the following: volunteering in a band or an orchestra and playing for residents in care facilities; singing in the choir; play reading; volunteering in palliative care; and facilitating groups for people with Alzheimer's and their spouses, suggests volunteering might be a helpful medium for those working with later life adults to expose their clients to.

The diversity of the demographic profiles of the participants in the current study helps to challenge the notions commonly promoted in our culture and in the literature about the role of partner, health, chronological age, education, and economic viability in ensuring the quality of later life. As was the case for the expert reviewers in this study, health care and mental health practitioners working with later life adults may benefit from reading the narratives of the participants in this study—which might serve to challenge the stereotypes found to be commonly held by those who work with older adults (e.g. Lagana, 2002; Lee & Volans, 2003; Rainsford, 2002; Ruppel, Jenkins & Griffin, 2010; Woolfe & Biggs, 1997). Recognizing that the 10 participants in the study did not view themselves as old, might encourage people who work with older adults to validate and explore the untapped potential of their older clients. Reading about the men and women in this study and the diversity of interwoven factors that make their lives vital, might help the people who work with later life adults understand more fully that older age does not necessarily determine lack of activity, continued dreams for the future, the capacity for new learning, or overall continued growth and development.

Considering how positive, hopeful, and optimistic the men and women in the current study appeared, counsellors who work with later life adults might consider incorporating aspects

of positive psychology into their therapeutic work. A number of authors and researchers (e.g., Carlsen, 1991; Carstensen & Gross, 1998; Hepple, 2004; Kenyon, Bohlmeijer & Randall, 2011; Matthews & Marwit, 2006; Park, Edmondson, Fenster & Blank, 2008; Ramsey & Blieszner, 2000; Ranzijn, 2002; Tugade, Fredrickson & Barrett, 2004) have found using positive psychology techniques with older adults to be beneficial. This could include working with their clients to re-author and reframe their stories of negative and stressful experiences, growing limitations, challenges, losses, and regrets and helping them see what has been and continues to be good in their life (Ardelt; Matthews & Marwit; Carstensen & Gross). Randall (2009) argues that “by developing a good, strong story” (p. 31) older adults can be assisted to counter what he sees as “narrative foreclosure” (p. 31) or the belief that their story has ended after retirement or the loss of health or the loss of a loved one, but their life continues on. Kenyon, Bohlmeijer, and Randall suggest that telling stories or using a narrative approach is “particularly appropriate to the exploration of such topics as memory and meaning, spirituality and wisdom” (p. xvi), when working with older people. Carlsen, Matthews and Marwit, and Park et al. found meaning-making therapy to be very beneficial for older adults who were finding it difficult to accept, adjust, change, develop or find meaning in the face of significant challenges or losses. Ramsay and Blieszner and Matthews and Marwit found that for some older adults, exploring spirituality and/or religious beliefs helped them cope with stressful life events and significant losses and helped them learn to be more accepting of life and their own mortality. Certainly nine of the ten participants in the current study reported that their religion and/or their sense of spirituality was a critical source of coping with challenges and losses and provided them tremendous comfort and life meaning.

There are a number of other findings from the current study that also have potential implications for those who work with the older adult population. The participants from the study

reported the importance of learning and staying active and engaged, and having routines. Professionals who work with later life adults might help their clients find interesting activities—ideally ones that they can plan and are interesting and “fun.” They might also work with their clients to establish daily or weekly routines, something the women and men in the study perceived to help them get up and get going and gave them something to look forward to. Since having satisfying and meaningful relationships and social engagement was considered crucial for vital living for the participants in the study, people who work with older adults might help their clients connect with family and/or friends and get them engaged socially through seniors’ centers or other avenues that cater to their interests and talents. Having humour and laughing a lot were perceived as critical elements of vital living for both the participants in the study and the peer reviewers. People who work with older adults might consider working with them to use and cultivate humour in therapy and in their lives. The men and women in the study spoke of the importance having enough money is for them to live vitally. Professionals might support members of the older population to have adequate finances in later life by helping them access a financial planner prior to their retirement or when they have lost a partner. Since feeling fortunate and grateful for their lives and life experiences were viewed as important contributors to vital living by the participants in the study, professionals who work with older adults might work with them to access the things in their lives—past and present—that they might feel gratitude for.

Implications for Future Research

This was a narrative study with a sample of only 10 participants. It may be useful to use other qualitative methodologies that still give voice to the participants’ experiences but add to, and perhaps deepen, our understanding of what it means to live vitally in older age. For example, a grounded theory study has the potential to contribute to the development of a theory of vital

living in later life. A phenomenological approach to this topic could help to identify the thematic essence of vital living for older adults. Future research might also include multiple perspectives on the topic, which might include interviewing significant others such as spouses/partners, close friends, and children whose knowledge and observations might broaden our understanding of how older adults live vitally. I generally found the women and men in the study to be somewhat modest and unassuming regarding their lives and personal, social, and professional achievements. Perhaps including other voices would have provided a more complete picture of the ways in which the participants were viewed by significant others as living vital lives. Identifying barriers to vital living might also be an important direction for future research. For example, participants spoke about having “enough” money and having “good enough” health and satisfying and meaningful relationships as important to their vitality. This suggests that these factors might be barriers to vital living for those who don’t have enough money, or good enough health, or are shut-ins due to health concerns and don’t have friends and family.

Overall, the participants in this study were quite a homogeneous group. With regard to future research, it might be useful to find out whether the experiences and common themes described in this study are reflected in the experiences of a broader range of older adults. In extending our knowledge of the experience of vital living in later life it will be important to examine whether such factors as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status play a significant role in shaping older adults’ experiences of vital living. Conducting research with participants over the age of 85 might also provide some valuable insights into what might constitute vital living for women and men in their tenth and eleventh decades who generally face more significant health challenges and transitions such as moving from independent to assisted living.

Research that focused on interventions based on one or more of the 10 common themes may provide counsellors and other practitioners with some more tools for working with older adults. This kind of research would concentrate on the potential benefits of specific interventions from the participants' point of view. Finally, a qualitative study with a positive psychology framework that focused on and explored the 10 themes of vital living might have the potential to provide the counselling community with some beneficial information and a strategy for working with older adults who are struggling to live well and age vitally. This study might potentially be done with a small group of older adult participants who self-define as not living satisfying or vital lives and a facilitator (the researcher). The group might meet once a week for 12 weeks and focus on learning about and exploring a different theme of vital living each week. For example, my master's thesis (Terrett, 2004) included my facilitation of a small group of women aged 71 to 89 years of age who performed their stories and experiences for each other during six three hour sessions over a period of two months. In performing their life experiences they connected to one another, shared their challenges and losses, reflected on their fears, adapted themselves in some ways and, generally, saw their lives (the good and the bad) as worthwhile and valuable. Such a group experience was a powerful vehicle for them to experience finding their voices and build self-confidence. Such a study might extend and add to what we know are efficacious ways of working with older adults who are not coping well with the challenges of the aging process.

Limitations

The research on vital living older adults presented here shares the limitations common to a narrative methodology. The findings are not generalizable to a larger population and are exploratory in nature (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 1993). Narrative research relies on replication of the study with other populations of older adults to further inform our understanding of the experience of living vitally in later life (Lieblich et al.; Riessman). In this

study 10 participants told their stories of living a vital life. I (the researcher) then identified common themes in their stories. This does not infer that these themes are common to all adults 70 years and older who self-define as living vitally. The sample was small and limited to women and men over the age of 69 years and under the age of 86 years. They defined themselves as heterosexual, middle-class to wealthy, Caucasian, and career individuals. It remains to be determined how such factors as SES, ethnicity and culture shape the meaning and experience of vital living for older adults and the extent to which the themes identified in the current study reflect and resonate with other groups of later life individuals. The current study was also limited by the fact that the participants elected to participate, which speaks to their motivation, willingness to tell their stories, and desire to make a difference. The experience of vital living may differ in significant ways for individuals who are not willing or interested in volunteering for this type of research study.

The research and findings may also be limited by the use of the word “vital.” When beginning this study I thought that because there was so little literature on vitality and later life it was a word that could potentially capture a broader picture of living well in late adulthood. However, during the initial interviews, some of the participants said they were confused by what I meant by the word vital and wondered if it was the right word to be using to capture the full range of their experiences. Perhaps the use of the word “vital” may have resulted in the exclusion of potential participants who did not relate to, or understand, what I meant by living a “vital” life in later adulthood. That said, during the interviews the participants reflected on so many levels about what vitality was and what it meant to them. For these 10 self-defining vital living women and men, being vital appeared to capture so much more than Ryan and Frederick’s (1997) definition of subjective vitality—“feeling alive, being full of energy and being alert” and the dictionary definition of vitality—“full of energy; lively.” The research and

findings may also be limited by not including participants over 85 years of age, the relative good health of the participants (only one participant had significant health challenges), the relatively privileged socioeconomic circumstances of the participants, and the lack of mental health issues for these participants.

Another limitation of the research and findings may be the researcher's own perspective, in particular because I identify more with many of my elders regarding some of my values than with my own generation. For example, my sense of family commitment and reciprocity is and has always been more similar to what I have witnessed among members of the older generations, especially, in my experience, first and second generation immigrant families. My sense of social responsibility has been strong throughout my life—especially with regard to volunteering—and this is a value that many of the older adults I know or have witnessed in action, or have read about hold dear. As well, I may tend to view my participants' through rose-colored lenses because I have such respect and admiration for the majority of older men and women, especially because of the challenges they have faced. I know that in the process of interviewing, transcription of interviews, analysis, and validation interviews I was often aware of how much I empathized with the participants and identified with some of their experiences. Although I am certain this enriched the research process, I am also aware that it inevitably shaped my way of perceiving and analyzing the participants' experiences and co-constructing the individual and common narratives. As detailed in Chapter 3, I used a number of ways to ensure that my interpretation of the findings was trustworthy and resonated with, and reflected, the experience of vital living for the 10 participants in the current study. However, it is impossible for any researcher to fully put aside and bracket her or his attitudes and beliefs and values and assumptions.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT POSTER

A Research Study Exploring

EXPERIENCES OF VITAL LIVING IN LATE ADULTHOOD

A graduate research study seeking to explore and understand the experiences of men and women **70 years of age and older who are living vital (energetic, lively, alert) and satisfactory lives** is being conducted by Marianna Terrett, a graduate student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia, under the supervision of Dr. Judith Daniluk.

We invite you to participate if you:

- Are 70 years of age or older;
- Speak English well;
- Feel you are living a vital life; and
- Are interested in talking about your experiences with a UBC researcher.

Participation in this Study Will Involve:

- A total of approximately three to four hours consisting of one or two separate, confidential, audio-taped interviews and one validation interview (discussion of the findings);
- Talking about your thoughts and feelings regarding your experiences of living a vital and satisfying life

Results of the study will be shared with the participants.

FOR INFORMATION PLEASE CALL:

Marianna

Thank You

APPENDIX B: TELEPHONE SCREENING FORM

- Thank you for calling. My name is Marianna Terrett and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. This research study is for my doctoral dissertation. My supervisor is Dr. Judith Daniluk.
- Before we begin, I need to ask you three questions to clarify whether or not you meet the criteria for participating in this study.

1. Are you aged 70 or over?
2. Do you consider yourself to be living a vital life?
3. Are you presently taking any medications that affect your mood or thinking?

If the person answers “no” to either question 1 or 2, I will thank them for their interest and tell them they don’t meet the criteria for the study. If the person answers “yes” to question 3, I will thank them for their interest and tell them that they don’t meet the criteria for the study. If the person answers “yes” to both questions 1 and 2, I will proceed to describe the research purpose and process.

- In order to help you to decide whether or not you are still interested in participating in this study, I’ll review the purposes and processes of this research. You are welcome to ask questions at any time.
- The purpose of this study is to learn about what the experience of living a vital life means to you. We have lots of information about the problems associated with the aging process. But we have very little information about how men and women in their 70’s, 80’s and 90’s are able to create and maintain vital lives. With so many more people living longer, it is important that we begin to focus on what it means to live a vital life in older adulthood so that others might learn from your story and experiences.

- The study will involve two confidential tape-recorded interviews, of one or two hours each, at your home or at a private space on the UBC Campus in the Department of Counselling Psychology or another mutually agreed upon suitable locale.
- During the first interview, you will have the opportunity to talk about your experience of living a vital and satisfying life. The interview will be tape-recorded. We can arrange to continue the interview a few days later, if you find you get tired or if you feel you did not have a chance to tell me all you'd like to say after 90 minutes.
- After I've written up all the interviews and created a synopsis of your story and the shared story of the other participants in the study, I will send you a copy of your story and the thematic analysis for you to read. A few weeks later we'll meet again for a brief interview, during which time I would like to hear from you whether I've accurately captured your experiences/story in my write-up.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. You can choose not to answer questions which you aren't comfortable answering during the interview.
- Overall, I hope that participating will be a pleasant experience for you and an opportunity to share some of your significant experiences. Do you have any questions?
- Are you still interested in discussing your experiences? If so, can we now set up a time for the first interview?

Name_____Age_____Male/Female_____

Phone Number_____

Preferred Time and Day for Contact_____

Preferred meeting time and location_____

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

OLDER ADULTS' NARRATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR EXPERIENCE(S) OF BEING VITALLY ENGAGED IN LIVING

Principal Investigator: Dr. Judith Daniluk, Professor
(Supervisor) Department of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia

Co-Investigator: Marianna Terrett, PhD Student
Department of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia

Purpose:

This study is being conducted to explore how adults 70 years old and older narrate and understand their experiences of being vitally engaged in living. The research is being conducted for Marianna Terrett's doctoral dissertation.

Study Procedures:

This study will involve three to four hours of your time:

1. The researcher will meet with you for one or, if needed, two individual interviews and one validation interview of approximately three hours. You will have an opportunity to share your experiences of living a vital life. The interviews will be tape-recorded. As well, you will provide a brief synopsis of background information.
2. After transcription, analysis, and interpretation of the confidential interviews, the researcher will develop a narrative summary. She may also identify some key themes, events or processes. The researcher will meet with you to discuss the findings and you will have an opportunity to review the themes and your personal narrative summary for accuracy and to provide comments.

Confidentiality:

Any information resulting from this research will be kept strictly confidential. Both Dr. Judith Daniluk (supervisor) and Marianna Terrett (co-investigator) will have access to the raw data. Collected data will be stored in a separate locked storage cabinet. All transcribed interviews will be assigned a code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. You will be assured anonymity by having a specific code for your name. You will not be identified by the use of your own name or initials and your identity will be kept strictly confidential in any publication resulting from this research. The tape-recordings will be demagnetized five years after the research has been completed. You will be given written copies of both your individual narrative and the thematic analysis.

Potential Risks/Benefits:

One potential risk of this study is that being 70 years or older, you might find the interviews physically or emotionally demanding. To minimize this risk, the interviews can be easily tailored to meet your physical and emotional needs. As with any work where people have the possibility of self-awareness and insight through remembering lived experience, there is always potential for feelings to come to light that might be stressful or uncomfortable. If you experience strong feelings during or after the interviews, you will be encouraged to speak to the researcher immediately or contact her by phone. The researcher has provided referral sources for professional help.

Participation in this study may be a positive experience for you. Knowing that your involvement in the study will provide the ‘expert’ outlook on living a vital and satisfied life for specialists in Developmental and Counselling Psychology or Gerontology, as well as aiding mental health practitioners in working with adults, may leave you with a feeling of satisfaction.

Renumeration/Compensation:

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

Contact for Information About the Study:

If you have any questions or would like further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Judith Daniluk at the Department of Counselling Psychology.

Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services.

Consent:

You have read the above information, and have had an opportunity to ask questions.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

APPENDIX D: ORIENTING STATEMENT

“The purpose of this study is to explore how women and men seventy years of age and older experience living vital lives. In our earlier discussion, you identified yourself as such a person. To help you begin your story, please take a moment to consider what living a vital life means to you and what things help make your life vital.” *I will pause, giving the person time to reflect. Then I will read the following section slowly:*

“Over the course of this interview, I would like you to tell me your story about living a vital life. I encourage you to tell your story the way you remember and understand it. I may ask you to expand upon or clarify details about your story, however, mostly I will listen. Please consider the following question:

“How are you living a vital life and what does living a vital life mean to you?” You may begin when you are ready?”

Throughout the interview, I may ask questions or use statements or probes that increase the depth of the interview, such as:

1. Tell me more about how that (experience, moment, time, realization, awareness, insight, etc.) was for you?
2. How was that (experience, event, awareness, etc.) significant for you?
3. How does that experience contribute to your sense of vitality?
4. What were your thoughts or feelings during that experience?
5. What do you think it takes for older adults to live vital lives?
6. If you were speaking to someone in their fifties about what they might need to do to live a vital life when they are older, what advice would you give them (or what would you say to them)?

7. How do you think your life is different from others in your age group who don't seem to be living vital lives?

When the participant has indicated that the story is finished, I will ask if there is anything further he or she would like to add. Then I will ask the following questions only if the narrative was a surface narrative: "In your story you have spoken about how you live a vital life. I would like to clarify my understanding regarding some facets of living vitally."

1. Is there anything else that you wish to add about living vitally that is important to your story – something that you didn't mention previously?
2. Being the age you are, what do you think the **significant** facets of vital living are for you and why are they significant?
3. What are some of the **challenges** that you have experienced or are experiencing to living a vital life at your age, and how have you dealt with them?
4. How is vital engagement reflected in how you live? In how you feel about life? In how you feel about yourself?
5. Where do you derive strength for living vitally?
6. What metaphor would describe your experience of living a vitally engaged life? What metaphor would describe you?

APPENDIX E: VALIDATION INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

Guide Questions for Individual Narrative Validation Interview with Participants

The purpose of this interview is to review your personal narrative that I have written based on the material from our earlier tape-recorded interview(s). During the past two weeks, you have had the opportunity to read and review this narrative. I would like you to consider the following questions:

1. Coherence - Is your story coherent? Are the findings understandable? Is there anything missing from your story – anything that you would like to add or change?
2. Comprehensiveness – Overall, is your story comprehensive? Are there enough details and content?
3. Resonance – Is the narrative an accurate reflection of your experience of living a vital life? Does it adequately capture your experience of living a vital life?
4. Pragmatic – If your participation in the study provided you with new insights and/or enhanced your life in any way, how did it do so? How do you think your story might influence/help others to live vitally?

Guide Questions for Common Themes Narrative Validation Interview with Participants

The purpose of this interview is for you to review the common themes narrative that I have written based on the common themes across all ten individual narratives. During the past two weeks, you have had the opportunity to read and review this narrative. I would like you to consider the following questions:

1. Coherence - Is the common narrative coherent? Are the findings understandable?
2. Comprehensiveness – Overall, is your story comprehensive? Are there enough details and content?

3. Resonance – Is the common narrative an accurate reflection of your experience of living a vital life? Does it adequately capture your experience of living a vital life?
4. Pragmatic – If your participation in the study provided you with new insights and/or enhanced your life in any way, how did it do so? How do you think the common story might influence/help older adults to live vitally or provide assistance for them to live a vital life?

Guide Questions for Validation Interview with Peer and Expert Reviewers

The purpose of this interview is to review the common narrative that I have written based on the common themes across ten individual narratives. During the past two weeks, you have had the opportunity to read, review and reflect on the narrative. I would like you to consider the following questions:

1. Coherence – Is the narrative coherent?
2. Comprehensiveness - Overall, is the common narrative comprehensive? Are there enough details and content?
3. Resonance – Given your expertise on this topic, is the common narrative an accurate reflection of living a vital life?
4. Pragmatic - Did reading and reflecting upon the narrative provide you with new insights? How did it do so? How will this narrative provide assistance to elders wanting to live a vital life? How could counselors and/or practitioners use this narrative to assist elders?

APPENDIX F: LIST OF COUNSELLORS

1. Theresa Nicassio, Ph. D.

Registered Psychologist

2. Lorne Prupus, Ph. D.

Registered Psychologist

3. Russell King, Ph. D.

Registered Psychologist

4. Barbara Madani, Ph. D.

Registered Psychologist

APPENDIX G: INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS

Don: Giving Excellent Effort, Living a Productive and Successful Life, and Making Life Better for Others

Don is a 73 year old former fighter pilot, former president of a major real estate company and current developer and co-owner and commercial landlord of tenanted buildings. From his first marriage, which ended in divorce, he has three children (one daughter and two sons) aged 48 through 52 years. He has been married to his current wife for 35 years (she has two children from her previous marriage) and presently has 11 grandchildren and one great grandchild. Don's narration of his experiences of being vitally engaged in living as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in his current life as well as newer themes that have evolved over the past 15 to 20 years. After being asked the questions, **"How are you living a vital life?"** and **"What does living a vital life mean to you?"** Don laughingly stated "I'm going to start at the end of the story" and began his story with passion, quickness and dynamism that seldom waned but was always enriched by colourful language, playfulness, deep felt emotion and a quick, at times wicked, sense of humour. Every once in awhile, during the interview, Don commented on the word "vital" and felt it was too narrow a description and didn't allow for an inclusion of living a fulfilling life.

Lifelong Learning, Goal Setting, Hard Work and Career

Lifelong learning, both formal and informal, continues to be important theme that has positively impacted Don's lifelong capacity for living fully, excitedly and vitally. To date Don's life journey has been one of continual learning and he reflects that when he was the vice-president/president of a major real estate company in his late 30's "I thought I knew it all! I didn't know nothing!" Don was born during the depression in a tent in Lac Vert, Saskatchewan to a "poor farming family." It was in early childhood that Don's *indomitable work ethic* was forged. He notes that for most of his life he *"made up for" his "inadequacies with a lot of hard*

work.” Don and his five brothers were raised in a house that “measured 12 feet by 18 feet.” He reflects “and we had nothing but good food and decent clothes to wear when we went to school. We had no luxuries of any kind.” Don had a close and loving relationship with his mother. However his father was physically, verbally, and emotionally abusive and their relationship was strained. Don finished grade nine and part way through grade 10, left school to run a farm for someone else. He did this from age 15 to 17 years old. At 18 years of age Don joined the air force eventually becoming a fighter pilot just after the Korean War. He married for the first time in 1957 at 21 years of age and his first wife and he had three children. After leaving the air force he “sold and settled claims for a moving company” for approximately three years and then entered the business of real estate in 1963/64.

Don joined a major real estate company and “opened all the offices on Vancouver Island” eventually becoming the President of this major company at the age of 38 years. After 18 years of marriage Don and his first wife divorced. He married his current wife in 1975. Don moved to Whistler, BC with his second wife and her two children in 1984 and returned to the real estate business. Soon after that, in 1986, he began building with two other men in Whistler and he reflects “miracles started to happen.” While still working as a real estate agent he formed a development company in Whistler. He retired from the real estate business in 2003 and moved into one of his newer buildings where his office is today. Don acknowledges that while he didn’t graduate from high school or attain a university degree he has “a Master’s Degree in Barnyard Psychology.” He credits *being engaged “in the business world for 55 years” as being a fertile place of learning.* During his career in real estate Don participated in many seminars and workshops. Currently Don continues to work six days a week attending to his developments and his commercial landlord duties include having 65 commercial tenants.

Don's successful careers as a realtor, president of a major real estate company, developer and commercial landlord have been a source of excitement and exhilaration for him and have been critical for his vital life both in the past and presently. According to Don, most of the people he knows who are around his age are not living vital lives. He thinks the reason for this is that a lot of people "go through life without any goal." Moreover they have "little ambition to achieve. They have no expectations of reward because they've done little for a reward." Goal setting is a lifelong theme and continues to be crucial for him to live vitally at age 73 years. Don derives deep satisfaction from continuing to have ambition, set goals and be excited about all the possibilities that are still a big part of his life and fuel his vitality. According to Don many of the people he knows who are not living vital lives have no excitement in their lives. He notes "I've got to have excitement in my life or I'd become a tired old fossil!"

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things, Achieving and Success, and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life are deeply meaningful, make Don's life full and fuel his vitality. Achieving and success are inexorably tied to Don's living a purposeful life and feeling that his life continues to be worthwhile and vital. An important way in which he derives strength to live a vital is from achieving success. He reflects "success breeds energy." He "expects success." He exclaims "I want my business to be successful!" Don states "Having a vital life means making the effort that's necessary to achieve." In his opinion effort and a vital life are synonymous. He reflects "I love my work at the office." However, Don is very aware that he is not as successful or wealthy as certain well-known entrepreneurs because he didn't want that level of wealth and success enough. He became quite intense as he stated that he has achieved what he has because, in his words, "this is the station in life that I deserve." Don acknowledges that he put enough effort into his work to enjoy the level of success he attained. With a lot of insight he reflects "a lot of people don't realize that money

is the most expensive thing in the world to buy.” He clarifies why money is so expensive to buy by noting “You pay for it with your soul, with your work, with your time, with your emotions.” Don is *very open about the personal price that he has paid as a result of his success* past and present. Besides a broken marriage, Don notes “yeah, there’s a sacrifice...I don’t go hunting or fishing. I don’t lay on the beach and brown my bum in the sun.” He reflects “I can’t be a successful business person if I don’t go to the office.” However, upon further reflection Don states “But there’s no sacrifice. I did everything I did, because that’s what I wanted to do. There was no sense of sacrifice at the time.”

Having a successful enough business, being a productive member of society and knowing that he is making a positive difference in other people’s lives are extremely rewarding for Don and crucial for him to continue to live vitally. In his words:

I think I would die if all I had to wake up to in the morning was as old age pension and a toothbrush. There’s got to be more to it than that. There’s got to be battles to win, fights to fight, decisions to make, people to help...

Advice that Don would give to younger generations if they intend to live vitally as older adults is to “*do productive things*” and be productive members of society through business, personal, social and/or community endeavours. He believes that people can only feel good about their lives which he feels is essential to being vital in older age if they *live their lives and “do” their lives “well.”* According to Don “*success is the greatest form of happiness in the world*” and his advice to younger people is to live successfully every day of their lives in order to live vitally in their 70s, 80s and beyond. He outlines how younger people can live their lives successfully everyday in the following description:

...success isn’t necessarily money...Success is being a good lover. Success is being a good neighbour. Success is dressing right. Success is working right. And if you want

to be a happy, fulfilled individual at 70 or 80, then from the time you're 30, you'd better get with it mister! And learn to *do your job with excellence!*

In Don's perception there's "no end to what success is" however it always starts from doing outstanding work. Don believes that a lot of younger generations are not living vital lives because they have not been "trained, motivated, nurtured" by previous generations "to be more productive." He advises the younger generations including people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s to *continue to be productive, contributing individuals* if they hope to live vitally as older adults.

Being productive enables Don to thrive. Connected closely to being productive in all fields of his life is "doing the job well." In Don's opinion *giving his best effort and doing the best job he can in any undertaking* is critical for his *self-respect* which is an important aspect of his vitality. He offers the following recipe for gaining self-respect and success in life:

If you want to be great; if you want to be successful, then you have an obligation every day to find something wrong...that you can make better. It doesn't matter if you move the garbage can; it doesn't matter if you arrange to have the blackboard cleaner; it doesn't matter what you did...*You've got to find ways to make it better...*

Don feels that in order for him to continue to generate a vital life for himself he needs to ensure, to the best of his ability, that his time spent with people is productive for both him and others. For example, he wanted this interview to be both productive and enjoyable for him and for me.

According to Don, his life continues to be meaningful and worthwhile because *in some small or bigger way life is better for others because he is alive*. He believes this is largely due to his *finding something that he can improve on every day and then doing it*. Don credits his mother with instilling in him the belief that changing little things "means you change the big picture" and that *one person can make a huge difference*. He reflects "mom made a huge difference by making sure six boys knew the importance of living her way." His mother modeled for her

children such values as honesty, *“have integrity, pay your way in life, and help somebody along the way.”* These are some of the important values that Don believes have always made his life purposeful, worthwhile and vital.

Personal Agency

Personal agency, including having choices and control, is a major way that Don feels empowered and vital. He is both the co-owner and landlord of his commercial buildings which means that he *has a lot of authority and control*. He reflects “I am the boss” and *being the boss means he has a lot of control in his life*, something that is important and crucial for his current vital living. Connected closely to having control is being engaged in decision-making. *Decision-making is a key factor in Don’s self-efficacy* which contributes to the sustenance of his vital life. He is aware and accepts that all of his decisions won’t be good ones, however when he believes that he has made good decisions whether business or personal or social ones *he feels he has “value.”* Don feels a sense of agency when he is *proud of the work he does whether job related, community related, maintenance related or socially related*. He says “I take tremendous pride in being capable.” *Being capable and/or competent* continues to empower Don’s very vital life.

Don’s derives a great deal of personal agency and vitality from his *positive and optimistic outlook on life*. According to Don, he views living as winning. He attributes *having a desire to win* as being key to his continued vitality and a critical reason for the personal, social and business success he has achieved throughout his life. “For me *to want to win is a must*” exclaims Don. He notes “Now when I lose, I don’t care...I’ve lost more than I’ve won, but I never went into a contest yet where I didn’t desire to win.” Overall, Don passionately asserts to living a “fulfilling life” He perceives that his current life is more fulfilling than when he was younger, mostly because he’s had years of life experience and life lessons that he learned from. Tied into having a positive and optimistic attitude is having a sense of humour. *Don has a vital sense of*

humour. As much as he can laugh at and with others, he can also laugh at himself. Having such a dynamic sense of humour is a deep source from which he can draw agency and carry on and live vigorously.

Learning to say “no” is very empowering for Don and according to him, it took him until the beginning of his seventh decade before he accomplished it. He reflects “One of the most terrible things in life is when I make decisions to make the other person feel good.” He explains further “ When I say, “yes” to something I really don’t want to say “yes” too...knowing it’s a marginal decision” it means that a lot of energy for living vitally is depleted. An important piece of advice that Don would give the younger generations in order for them to live vitally as an older adult is *not to be afraid to say “no” to something they don’t want to do*. According to Don, he was 60 years old before he was able to say “no” mainly because he wanted to be “liked.” He comments “When I say “no” to a mediocre idea I feel so relieved.” All the mediocre things that Don committed to that he really didn’t want became “burdens” that he carried around. Saying “no” is very efficacious for Don because it unburdened him and provided him with a new store of energy as well as more time to make good decisions, all things that make him feel good about himself.

Connected closely to saying “no” to people is the *importance* to vital living of *being selective*. Don has become selective not only in who he is willing to deal with both in business and personally but he has also become more selective about the business decisions he makes, even if that means that a business partner might not like his decisions and that the business partner might walk away. Twenty years ago Don notes he wouldn’t have been able to jeopardize a business partnership even if he knew a decision was not a good one. Saying “no” and being more selective is very agentic for Don and this contributes a lot to his “well-being” remaining intact, something which helps ensure his life satisfaction and vitality.

Don states that “it’s important...to have honour” and that *being an honourable person*—a man whose “word means everything” has been “his life for seventy years.” According to Don *he can be counted on to tell the truth and follow through any commitment he makes*. If he “screws up” he admits it. Don considers himself to be *someone who can be trusted*. Having honour is a value Don holds dear and one that has empowered him throughout his life to feel good about himself, derive a lot of meaning for living from and live vitally every day.

Keeping Busy and Involved by Having Interests, and Staying Fit, Active and Healthy

Keeping busy and involved by having, developing and pursuing interests is critical in ensuring that Don’s life is interesting and exciting which nurtures and sustains his ability to live vitally. Don works a full day starting at 8:00 am every week day and goes into the office on Saturday and Sunday for a few hours. According to Don *when he is busy he feels full of energy*. Being a developer and a commercial landlord means that Don *maintains an acute interest in the real estate market, the community he lives in and the ups and downs of the economy*. “Am I leading a vital life?” he asks and then proceeds to answer his question in the following way:

Let’s put it this way; I get up in the morning around 5:30/6:00. I have two/three cups of coffee, watch the news, play a couple of video games, go to work...I’m, busy. And I’m fulfilled.

Don loves and respects nature and spends a lot of time both working in it and enjoying it. He has chosen to live in a community surrounded by nature including mountains and lakes and forests. He spends a lot of time in nature whether in the forest cutting down trees for firewood or stacking this split wood into the large and immaculate wood shed that adjoins his house.

Staying fit, active and healthy are priorities for Don and are crucial ways in which he feels good and sustains his vital life. He reflects “I know I’m really active.” While Don doesn’t do a formal fitness program or work out at a gym he is extremely fit, active and healthy. In some

ways, Don lives somewhat of a pioneer style of life because he does a lot of the physical labour involved in maintaining his home and providing firewood for his fireplace. This contributes greatly to his fitness and excellent health. According to Don he was “a heavy, heavy drinker” and *quit drinking alcohol* the first time for 13 years and, more recently, for nine months. The test results from his most recent visit to his doctor and the lab revealed that he has no problems with his blood pressure, cholesterol, or blood sugar. He eats well and *leads a “wholesome” life*. Don feels “absolutely incredible” knowing he *is in excellent health* because, in his words “by being healthy, it makes me feel good. And by being healthy, I can do things” and feeling good and doing things fuels Don’s vital lifestyle.

In part because he is so active and physically capable *Don views himself as much younger than 73 years old*. He reflects “You know, I’m 73 but I think realistically I’m about 45, 47. Maybe 50, at the oldest.” Tied into *viewing himself in a younger light is Don’s ability to live spontaneously in the moment* which feeds his vitality. When he takes on chores or tasks, small or large, he tends to do so with joy. During the interview Don was *often spontaneous and living in the moment*. Don describes why he feels so much younger than his age might signify when he describes a typical day in the woods to get firewood.

I can go out with 50 year old guys and, for example, when I’ve got a chainsaw in my hand and I’m cutting the trees down and I’m chopping them up and throwing in the truck and splitting it and piling it, the 50 year olds are fagged and old grampa here is still hammering away on seven out of eight cylinders.

Another example of Don’s high level of fitness is that he shovelled the “snow and acorns and needles off the trees” from the numerous and large decks attached to his house the day before he was interviewed by me. He laughingly says that if I had seen him shovelling the snow off his decks I would have said “that sonofabitch, he’s vital.” Don’s *pride in his physical strength and*

capability is also apparent when he describes helping one of his employees move some “pretty heavy” furniture and laughingly reflects “It took all three of them to carry one end [of a sideboard] and I was able to handle the other end...I was pleased that I wasn’t a crippled old fart.”

Carrying On, Adapting to Change, and Coping With Life’s Challenges

Carrying on, adapting to change and coping with life’s challenges are lifelong themes that continue to play out in Don’s current life and are significant ways in which he continues to live a vital life in his eighth decade. There are some challenges that Don has experienced or is still experiencing that could have a significant impact on his ability to live a vital life.

A major challenge that Don is currently living with is that he and his wife live apart. He reflects “I’ve had to pay a price for what I’ve got. And the price is a broken marriage.” Don openly admits that neither he nor his wife want a divorce or legal separation because “it would destroy the company” and their income. The *challenge* that Don is currently having is *accepting the relationship as is, without intimacy*. He reflects “Accept! Accept what is! If I’m not prepared to pay the price of a divorce or separation, then quit bitching and be happy with it.” Don copes with this quite significant challenge by *making it the “best relationship” he can under the circumstances*, including remaining a good friend with his wife.

Having courage is critical for Don’s sense of well-being and contributes greatly to his perception of living a vital life. *Having the courage of his convictions and standing up for what he believes is right even if it is not politically correct* is an important way that Don carries on and copes with all the challenges, little or big, that have come and continue to come his way. Over the years Don has *learned to release his emotions*. Throughout the interview he was *able to express his feelings* and show a wide range of emotions from sadness to exhilaration to joy to anger to frustration to excitement to passion. When he is deeply touched by someone’s courage

or the remembering of a deeply felt memory, he wells up with emotion and cries.

Acknowledging his emotions and expressing them helps him to cope with life's challenges.

While Don does not view himself as religious, he does acknowledge *having a spiritual aspect to his life* which has played a significant role in his life. He describes this as “an aura that exists” and always has existed for him in a life that was fraught with danger including having airplanes blow up around him and cars he was in, roll into ditches. He believes that he is alive today because he has always been “protected” by his mother’s aura which he views as “almost a safety net or an umbrella to hide under.” *The comfort that this spiritual element fosters in Don* gives him a lot of strength to continue to risk and live vitally.

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal responsibility is a lifelong theme and continues to be important and contribute a lot to Don’s vital life. He takes responsibility for his health by keeping active and physically fit. Don takes a lot of pride in himself and how he presents and attires himself. For this interview Don described how 20 minutes before I was to show up at his house he was still in “a dirty pair of jeans and an old shirt” because he was working outside. By the time I arrived he was dressed up and “didn’t look like a bum.” He takes responsibility for his home by maintaining it. He takes responsibility for his personal workplace environment by keeping it clean and attractive. He pays his bills on time or before, and he always takes care of business. *Don takes responsibility for having created and continuing to create the life that is important and meaningful to him.*

Don is *very generative*. *Making a positive difference in people’s lives* is important and makes Don feel good which sustains his vital life. He says that he wants to make a difference in my life, someone who is a virtual stranger to him, stating that he wants to make “a contribution” to my degree. By being generative Don also recognizes that down the road he will be appreciated

for his generosity, time and effort. *This reciprocity feeds his vital life. Helping others* is another important way in which Don derives strength to live a vital life. Don believes *that he is a good communicator with members of all generations* and that is an important way he is able to adapt to the challenges and changes inherent in living into old age. He is both *a teacher and a student of life* and that is critical for his life to be vital in the present.

Taking social responsibility is a theme that is currently critical to Don's sense of well-being and ability to live a vital life. While he is clear that he doesn't wish for me to "overstate" the degree of his social responsibility he does reflect "I do an awful lot for an awful lot of people." Don *cares deeply about not only his own family but about other people as well*. This extends to people he doesn't know, acquaintances and friends. Often Don's caring looks a lot like tough love. He *tends to be direct and straightforward* not only in his business dealings but also in his social dealings. Don views caring as two-fold: first there is the feeling of caring and then there is the taking of action or as Don so colourfully states "The key is to get off your ass" and put caring into an action. Don is *proactive in his caring*. He shares a story of a recent experience he had with the owner of a restaurant whose business was not good. He sat with the man whom he'd just met for the first time and told him he was going to give him some "free" advice. He then proceeded to tell him in no uncertain terms what was wrong with his business and how he could improve it. Don reflected on how "very few people would have the nerve to talk to someone they'd met for the first time" the way that he had talked to this man. He says he was "not surprised" when the man phoned him later on in the day and thanked him and asked him if they could meet and talk some more. Don acknowledged he "really cared" and that this means helping someone do a better job by *being honest*. Honesty is a lifelong trait and one Don values deeply and credits with contributing in a large way to his vital life.

Don feels he is *a giving and generous person*, something that he values and he believes he will be rewarded “far, far more” than he will ever give and from this he gains deep satisfaction which nurtures his vital life. According to Don his commercial tenants view him in a very positive and helpful light. When tenants in his buildings miss their rent Don reflects on how he asks them “what in the world can I do to help you so that you’re more successful?” Instead of changing the locks and giving them notice Don helps his tenants when they need help. Don lent one of his employees the down payment (interest free) so that she would be able to buy a house. This is another example of his “generosity” or sense of social responsibility.

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Having satisfying relationships is important for Don’s well-being and sense of living a vital life. He has been married for 35 years to G. and considers her to be his “good friend.” However in recent years G. began spending winters in California and summers in Africa, which means that Don spends the majority of each year living alone. Although Don and his wife talk every day by phone, sometimes three times a day, he reflects “frankly I live alone about nine months of the year.” This is a source of “disappointment” for him and potentially something that could impact negatively on his ability to live as vitally as he currently does.

Having close, connected relationships with his children are a source of comfort, support, and meaning for Don and enervate his life. He communicates a lot with his children and laughingly reflects “when they’ve got a problem, when they want help, when they want an idea to be refined they get a hold of gramps.” *Being there for his children and being dependable* means a lot to Don. His children were quite young—aged 7 through 11 years—when Don and his first wife divorced and he reflects that they “resented” and blamed him for “splitting up” the family. According to Don, his children lived full time with their mother when he and their mother separated and divorced. He says he saw his children “irregularly” until they were adults.

However, he notes, “we have, through a lot of tears and effort, created an incredible bond.”

According to Don all three of his children are very successful, but still contact him to run by any ideas they have. He derives a lot of satisfaction knowing his children respect his knowledge and business sense and still come to him for advice.

Don derives a lot of *satisfaction and vitality from the friendships he has made and sustained over the years* both in the real estate world and in his current career as a developer and commercial landlord. *He feels comfort* knowing that his family and friends care about him and will help him if they are needed. *He feels invigorated when he is with other people* and believes that this is a reciprocal relationship because he views others as being invigorated by him.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is a relatively recent theme for Don and a source from which he draws understanding, meaning and vitality. Don acknowledges “packing some baggage” from childhood because from the age of five years old his father told him “you’ll always be a failure; you’re nothing but a bum.” He describes his father as a terrible man” and reflects “He beat us boys something terrible...He beat the animals...He abused the neighbours.” Having grown up suffering such abuse left Don with some “bad scars.” He reflects “I’ve always had an emotional void” and he explains this as “craving recognition” from the time he can remember.” Don has come to understand that the scarring and the “emotional void” have given him “*a desire to be the best he can be*” and he reflects “I am the best I could make myself.” Insight Don has gleaned over the years and appears to be an important tenet he lives his life by is that *his “innermost need”* which is to *do the best job he can*, can only be satisfied by *engaging with and both serving and being served well by others*. He notes that the pride he feels in knowing he has made himself the person he is today—the best person he could have made himself—is deeply satisfying and invigorating.

“Getting recognized” and being appreciated is crucial for Don to live vitally at age 73 years because, as he reflects, “it drives my engine...it makes me feel good.” *Having recognition from others* is a very important way in which Don gains strength to live vitally. “I’m highly respected” Don reflects. *Being highly respected* satisfies his need for recognition and contributes to his living vitally. Currently craving recognition is akin to a double-edged sword because as Don aptly states “on one hand I’ve arrived where I wanted to arrive” in terms of having a successful career and being recognized for that but “on the other hand, I still crave that recognition...if I look at the negative side of my life, by living the life I have, I now end up living alone a lot of the time.”

When people ask Don for his help he feels that one of his greatest needs is being satisfied. *Being needed is the pinnacle of recognition for Don*; “there’s no greater recognition.” According to Don *being needed by others helps him “grow.”* Continuing to grow is important, meaningful and greatly enhances the vital life that Don lives. He passionately reflects “the most valuable things in the world are free! You can’t get them with money!” For Don the most important things that money can’t buy are “*helping people and being helped.*”

Although Don feels his life has always been a vital one he notes that until approximately 20 years ago he was constantly “struggling to” achieve, to be recognized, and to be financially secure. The “struggling” consumed a lot of his energy. When he came to know he was respected 20 years ago, he became “a little more calm” and “a little more self-assured” and “a little more satisfied” which meant he had greater stores of energy to draw upon to live vitally. Don relates a story that took place at a sales seminar he attended approximately 20 years ago. He was with a group of younger people and was asked for the one quality he had that he believed helped or drove him most to become successful. He really pondered this question thinking “it’s because I want to be rich” and then “no, no, I think I’m afraid to be poor” and then “no, I’m craving

recognition.” However he wasn’t satisfied with any of those answers. Later on, in the evening, one of young salesmen told Don “You’re the only person we’ve ever met who isn’t afraid of making a mistake.” Currently Don believes he is “leading a vital life” in large part because as he reflects “I am not afraid of making mistakes.” *Not being afraid to make mistakes frees Don to take risks, make decisions, and not worry.* He says “I think the fear of failure, the fear of making mistakes is paralyzing. I can’t allow it to be in my life. If I’m afraid of failure, there’s no hope!” According to Don it is critical to *learn from the mistakes he has made* and go on and “make the best decisions and the fewest mistakes.” Don is a hopeful individual and *challenging himself to risk and take some chances in all aspects of his life* is extremely important, gives him hope and contributes immensely to his vital life. Connected to risk taking is *embracing experiences that are challenging.* Don thrives on taking on challenging experiences.

Don has reflected upon and acknowledged his weaknesses as well as his strengths in more recent years. He feels some regret that he has “hurt people” because he was “too assertive” or “too intolerant” or “too aggressive” or “selfish” or “greedy.” But overall, he views himself in a positive light, as being a good, respected and successful person, and being where he wants to be in his life. In his words:

And if somebody said, “Don, if you had your life to live over again, would you do anything different? You’re goddamned right! I can think of thousands of things I would have done different. But I would want to be right here, at this table, today, the way I am. So, I would change the journey, but I wouldn’t change where I am for anything in the world!..Yeah, I would change the journey but not the result. The end result is great!

Financial Security and Freedom

Having financial security and being wealthy is very important because it ensures that Don has the *freedom to live his life the way he wants to because he has lots of options*. He notes “I want for nothing.” He reflects “I still make a lot of money.” He no longer has to struggle to ensure that he is financially secure and this frees him from worrying about having enough money to continue to live the life he values as he ages. This is a “comfortable” place for him currently. Don is very clear that *having financial freedom* contributes a great deal to his ability to live vitally. Besides his home in Whistler he owns a place in California.

Being financially secure enables Don to help his children and grandchildren financially without any worry that he will find himself in a financial bind. It means that Don’s wife can live in California and/or Africa for large parts of the year. Having a secure financial foundation means that Don can lend money to his employees without asking for interest. Having investments ensures that Don can continue to develop properties, build commercial buildings and be in charge of his business as well as his personal life. These are all significant things that contribute greatly to Don’s very vital current life.

Feeling Fortunate for His Life, Loss, Accepting Inevitable Changes, Adapting and Carrying On

Don feels grateful and “fortunate” for many of the things in his life which provide meaning and make his life full and vital. He notes “And life always treated me pretty good.” He is thankful for his 35 year marriage, his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, his successful careers and the personal rewards and material things that he has in his life because of his success. He is able to travel, help his family and others financially if he chooses to do so, and continue to be self-employed in work that is challenging and satisfying. For all these things he feels fortunate. Don reflects “If I was a religious person I’d say *I was very blessed.*”

Creating memorable and meaningful memories play a significant role in Don's current life and he *feels fortunate and grateful for the satisfaction that memories bring to his life*. During this interview Don showed me around the home that he and his wife contributed a lot of planning, design, artistic work and physical labour to. His home truly is his castle and the memories it contains are extremely meaningful and profoundly important to his sense of competence and well-being. Don takes great pride in his home and all the work both he and his wife contributed to it. Throughout the interview Don narrated stories of seminars and workshops he attended when he was working in real estate and was heading up a large real estate company. The memories of these events and certain people who mentored him and inspired him and befriended him live vigorously in Don. They continue to spark him and motivate him. He feels grateful for these experiences.

Don is no stranger to loss. He has been divorced and has been faced with repercussions inherent in a marriage breakup including the hurt that his children experienced and the resentment they felt toward him. Both his parents died, albeit they lived well into their 90s. Some of his siblings have died. Currently Don is dealing with the loss of living apart from his wife. This loss is particularly difficult for him but he reflects on his *coming to terms with his marital situation and accepting the changes inherent in such a loss*. The cost of loving what he does and of continuing to work as hard at his job as he does has been high. According to Don his wife likens his job to having "a mistress" who he won't leave. While Don acknowledges that "there's disappointment in the ways things are" he also is very clear that he does not dwell on the loss of romance and intimacy in his marriage. Don *doesn't ruminate or dwell on any of the losses in his life*; instead he continues to go out and make his life and grow as a person.

Don *carries on, accepts that he cannot have both an intact marriage and continue to work as hard at his business*, and has somewhat *adapted* to his changed life situation. *He has*

had to reinvent his life to some degree as a result of another “broken marriage.” He lives the life of a single person and has learned to be a “good cook” and be fully responsible for the housework and looking after his physical needs.

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

Don chose as his metaphor for living a vital life at age 73 years: “Be exciting to others.” He believes it is critical to not allow himself to become “boring.” By being exciting to others and staying interesting Don feels that people will remember him because he will have given them ideas and inspired them to live a more interesting and vital life.

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

Don chose as his tangible representation of living a vital life at 73 years of age one of his commercial buildings that is the flagship building in the commercial area in Whistler. This building represents an amalgamation of having a purpose in life, looking forward to things, being capable and feeling his life is worthwhile. The building symbolizes his hard work, achievement and success, connecting with and helping others, and being engaged in living. He takes great pride in it.

Elisabeth: Living A Full Life with Hope, Choices and a Deep Connection with Others

Elisabeth is a 69 year old (70 in August) single woman, former certified dental assistant and member of a large extended family. Elisabeth’s narration of her experiences of living vitally as an older adult contains lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in her current life as well as newer themes that have evolved in her 50’s and 60’s. After being asked the questions: **“How are you living a vital life?”** and **“What does living a vital life mean to you?”** Elisabeth immediately said “Well, actually, it means quite a lot to me” and commented on how she had been thinking about the questions since she saw the poster for the study and we talked on the

phone. Over the course of two interviews and with clarity, gentleness, warmth, humour and steadfastness Elisabeth narrated the story of her vital life.

Having a Positive Attitude, A Sense of Humour and Being Optimistic

At the beginning of the interview Elisabeth reflects “the thing that makes me a vital person is a positive attitude.” She believes that many of the older adults she knows who are not living vital lives have negative attitudes and lack a sense of humour. According to Elisabeth *having a positive attitude, being optimistic, having a sense of humour, not taking herself to seriously*, and “seeing the glass as always half full” has been her foundation for meaningful and vital living, a foundation that she credits her parents, especially her mother, and extended family for forming in her childhood. “I think my vitality has a lot to do with how I was brought up,” Elisabeth comments noting that both her parents had positive attitudes and “wanted the very best” for her.

Elisabeth is an only child born during World War II and for the first five and a half years of her life her father, a fighter pilot, was fighting in the war so she did not see him. Elisabeth reflects that in essence her mother was a single mother during the early part of her childhood and profoundly influenced her ability to view life positively. As stated by Elisabeth her mother always called her on any negative behaviour including “moping around” or “feeling sorry for herself” and would say “change your attitude and get with it.” Elisabeth reflects “I don’t think you can be vital if you’re not happy” and adds “if you’re positive that’s a big contribution to having a happy...life.” Elisabeth believes that *having a positive mental attitude* is connected to being happy and both are critical for a vital life. She notes “if I just focused on the negatives...I’d shut down inside...it would drag me down.” Elisabeth, in part, is living a vital life because she “looks at the rosy side of things.” According to Elisabeth “*being happy and/or at peace*” with herself is crucial to her well-being and her ability to carry on and cope with challenges. Elisabeth

believes that people who are apathetic or sad or lethargic or have things that are “bothering” them are limited in living a truly vital life.

Elisabeth reflects “every day’s a new beginning.” Waking up, looking forward to every day as having the potential to be new and wonderful is a source of great hope for Elisabeth which contributes greatly to her ability to continue to live a vital life. *Having hope and being a hopeful person* are major sources from which Elisabeth draws her vitality. She reflects “I keep my own house in order and hope for the best.” Elisabeth hopes for her life to be long-lived and vital and feels hopeful that while there may be “one apple in the barrel” that is bad the vast majority of people are decent. The hope she feels for herself and for humanity imbues her life with purpose and is “reassuring” and supports her to look forward to every day. Connected closely to her capacity for hope is her *capacity for trust*. Having trust in others helps guarantee she looks forward to things which is so crucial in fuelling her vital life. She reflects “I don’t know how I’d live any kind of a life without trust!”

Carrying On, Adapting and Coping With Life’s Challenges

According to Elisabeth she has “always been quite vital” and been able to live vitally in the face of some very difficult challenges. *Carrying on, adapting and coping with life’s challenges* are lifelong themes that are even more relevant currently and critical for Elisabeth to live a vital life because she is living with some significant health problems. *Having the ability to adjust and adapt to life changes and challenges* has been a major theme throughout Elisabeth’s life and continues to play a major role in her current life. Adjusting and adapting are critical to her well-being and contribute a lot to her current vital life. When her father returned home from the war it was a major “adjustment” for both Elisabeth and her mother. She reflects “It wasn’t just mom and me anymore.” However, according to Elisabeth, adapting and adjusting were made easier because her father “was a very loving father.” As well, her huge extended family played

an important role in pitching in and helping make the transition as smooth as possible. Elisabeth has found that *planning*, especially *having a plan A and a plan B* is an effective way in helping her adjust, adapt and cope when she is feeling a bit down or being bothered by something. She reflects that when she starts to mope “I’ll sort of shake myself and say “‘All right, let’s get on with this’” or “‘let’s do something like make a couple of phone calls.’” Basically Elisabeth has a number of plans or things she can do to “perk” herself up and feel more vital. In order to carry on, adapt and cope with some significant life challenges Elisabeth tends to follow her father’s advice which was to not put “all her eggs in one basket” which means she has more than one plan or way of doing things to draw on when needed.

Having a rich and meaningful spiritual life is an important source for coping and contributes a lot to Elisabeth’s ability to continue to live vitally. “My spiritual world is pretty good” notes Elisabeth. For many years she practiced religion and attended church and states “I don’t show up at a practising religion anymore.” She believes in “one supreme being” and that by practicing teachings such as “*look after one another and be thy brother’s keeper*” she is journeying toward the “peace” she will find with the “supreme being” upon death. According to Elisabeth, *having a love of nature* is an integral part of her spirituality. *Spirituality and reflecting on life and nature* are interchangeable for Elisabeth and make it possible for her to “calm down and focus” on what matters to her and how she can go about doing what is meaningful for her. In her words:

I reflect; I sit and reflect out my window and look at the water and think, “there’s the water and the sky and there goes a bird by and those trees keep growing” and if I can just calm down here and focus on the spirit, that is helpful to me. And I don’t know what it would be to lack that. That could cause a problem if you didn’t have that.

Without a “spiritual connection” Elisabeth feels she would lack focus and be “sort of rudderless in the world and not as vital.”

Perspective-taking is a very important coping skill for Elisabeth and contributes a lot to her ability to live a vital life at the end of her seventh decade. She reflects “I don’t think I’ve ever done anything I haven’t got into a proper perspective.” Connected closely to perspective-taking is *sorting things out and working through things*, all necessary for Elisabeth to look forward to everyday and lead a vital life. *Figuring things out, thinking things through and finding another way around something that doesn’t seem to be working* are important ways that Elisabeth copes with life in general and challenging situations specifically. Her advice to people in their 40’s and 50’s would be to develop a positive attitude and have a plan B if they hope to live vitally as older adults. Another important way Elisabeth carries on, adapts and copes with life’s challenges is by *acknowledging her feelings, listening to them and being proactive about “getting busy and doing things” instead of worrying and ruminating*. She likens this way of coping to “a chain effect” and notes that “one thing leads to another” and if one thing gets “sorted out then the rest comes forward.”

Elisabeth would advise people in their 40’s and 50’s to look after their health because *having good health* enhances and makes it easier to live vitally. Elisabeth has ongoing significant and life threatening health issues. Elisabeth comments that she has “fought a weight problem” since her 20’s and notes that “obesity” is a precursor to her “interlinked” health problems. Elisabeth certainly *did not dwell or ruminate on her health problems* or spend much time talking about them during the two interviews even though she notes “The biggest challenge I have of keeping myself vital is my health.” However even though she lives with such significant health issues Elisabeth, by virtue of a lifelong foundation of *values and having effective coping effective coping skills* is living a vital life.

The Importance of Satisfying, Caring, Connected and Sharing Relationships

“I enjoy people” exclaims Elisabeth. *Having satisfying, affectionate, connected and sharing relationships* is a critical aspect of Elisabeth’s well-being and a deep source of her strength for living vitally. *Satisfying relationships are reciprocal* for Elisabeth; according to her she gains as much or more from others as she gives. She notes “generating warmth and receiving warmth...it’s a positive thing.” The significance of these caring and supportive relationships, whether with family members, friends and/or former co-workers, was especially meaningful for Elisabeth during her recent major surgery and her stay in hospital and her recuperation at home. *Having had a loving and close relationship with her mother and father* has been a great source of strength and vitality throughout Elisabeth’s life. Elisabeth considers her mother to have been a wonderful role model because “she was a very social, outgoing person, and helpful...” She believes that because her mother was “a bit older...32” when Elisabeth was born, younger people tended to look up to her and seek her advice. At 91 years of age, Elisabeth’s mother recently passed away. Elisabeth tears up and weeps, at times, when she talks of family and remembers her parents; she misses them. *Having a large and supportive extended family* is important for Elisabeth’s well-being and critical for maintaining her vital life. However, she reflects, laughing and tearing up “I’m in life by myself...I have a big extended family, but I have to look after me, so I have to be vital!”

Elisabeth never married and never had children. She enjoys the company of men, young and old, but she reflects that she never “lived with a man for any great length of time.” She acknowledges that there was a stage in her life when dating and having boyfriends “was lots of fun” but currently wouldn’t want “to have a steady boyfriend” and everything that might entail. According to Elisabeth the period of her life when she had boyfriends was a very vital time and contributed a lot to her being the person she is today. She admits to still *feeling feminine and*

enjoying being a woman. “It’s fun to meet a bright, young man!” reflects Elisabeth and to “kibitz” and/or flirt with him and it makes her time more enjoyable and her life more vital. Elisabeth *wonders what her life might have been like if she had children.* She reflects that in her generation “It wasn’t acceptable for single women to have children by themselves” but admits that she “might” have liked to have had or adopted a child and that “it might have been fun to have had one.” However Elisabeth is very clear that not having children has not made her life less vital because she has always had a lot of people in her world.

Having a rich social life and satisfying and connected relationships with friends and acquaintances brings “joy” into Elisabeth’s life and is another important source of vitality for her. Elisabeth reflects “I have friends of all ages.” She enjoys being engaged with the younger generations and comments that *being around younger people* is something she looks forward to, makes her life fuller and more worthwhile and is something that energizes her. As well Elisabeth finds being around younger people “broadens” her life because she sees “different opinions and different outlooks on the same thing.” On some level, conscious or unconscious, Elisabeth tends to surround herself with friends who are living vitally. She comments “Most of my friends are vital.” Elisabeth thinks that this *selectiveness* can be explained by the idea of “like things” attracting like things. By being “happy and outgoing” Elisabeth attracts friends who are similar. She reflects “I have the joy of having a lot of friends and acquaintances so I’m not this lonely little thing.” “I’m a hugger,” she comments. Elisabeth feels “warm” and “fuzzy” inside when she hugs people and she considers *the ability to connect with others physically* to be a lifelong trait. Elisabeth considers herself to be *outgoing* and understands this to be because of living a childhood and adolescence in which her parents opened their home to “extended family members, neighbours, foster children” and “friends” She considers the fact that her childhood home always being “open to people coming and going” “was a very positive thing and a very

vital thing.” Currently Elisabeth continues to make her home a “warm” and “welcoming” place for family and friends.

Elisabeth’s innate sociability extends beyond family, friends and acquaintances to strangers. *Engaging with people*, whether or not she knows them, is extremely invigorating and rewarding for her. Elisabeth tells a number of stories of talking to people when she is in lines while shopping and how so many times being interested in other people and what is going on for them leads to very positive responses from them. *Sharing herself with others* including giving her time and attention to them and getting positive feedback including smiles and gratitude for listening “sort of snowballs” and makes Elisabeth want to keep on giving of herself.

Communicating and connecting with others and making their day a bit better makes Elisabeth feel “warm” inside. “Making an effort to connect with others” is an important way she “makes things happen” not only with the people she knows, but also expanding her horizons and accessing the “outside world.”

Overall Elisabeth believes that to be without family or friends or acquaintances would be “boring” and “terrible. She reflects “for me to be truly alone would be a terrible thing.”

However, she is quick to point out that by knowing she has good friends and a caring family and that people will regularly be in contact with her either by phone or in person she is able to *feel “comfortable” and content when she is by herself*. It is very comforting for Elisabeth to know that she is not “truly alone” because if she became indisposed and found herself unable to get up or help herself she could phone someone and count on them to come over and help her. *Feeling comforted that she can count on others* means that her energy is not diminished by worrying.

Personal Agency

Having personal agency has always been an important theme throughout Elisabeth’s life and contributes greatly to her current vital life. *Learning, education, both formal and informal,*

and having a meaningful career are all significant themes connected to having personal agency and ways in which Elisabeth has been empowered and makes meaning of her life. They are critical for her ability to sustain a vital life in the past and continuing in the present. Formal learning has played an important role in Elisabeth's agentic and vital life. She graduated from grade 12. After one year of college/vocational training she became certified as a dental assistant which was her life career. When reflecting on her career she notes "It was fun. I enjoyed working; I really liked it and I enjoyed the people and trying to make the people feel better." Throughout her career Elisabeth "spent a lot of time doing...a certain amount of continuing education to maintain licensure." When she worked as a dental assistant she read a lot of journals, which increased her knowledge about dentistry and kept her mind keen. *Gaining knowledge and having a keen and active mind* is important and contributes a lot to an empowered and vital life. Elisabeth is adamant that she is still learning reflecting "*I haven't stopped learning! And I hope I never do!*" According to Elisabeth *learning keeps her mentally fit by "broadening" her mind. Self-reflection* is closely tied to having personal agency for Elisabeth and she *has reflected a lot* on what constitutes a vital life generally and hers' specifically. Elisabeth views being empowered and living vitally as "an accumulation" of all that she has "learned along the way"

Being an independent person, having and making choices and having a lot of control in her life contribute to Elisabeth's self-efficacy which feeds her vital life. Being an independent and *determined* person are lifelong themes, something Elisabeth says her parents "made a big effort" to ensure and something that has enhanced her vital life in the past and currently—especially because she is a single woman and doesn't have a partner who she can call and depend on when needed. *Having choices* is a theme that is significant and contributes greatly to Elisabeth's vital life. Elisabeth believes that she has always had the *choice to create a wonderful*

and valued life and this continues presently amidst the significant health challenges she faces. Furthermore she chooses “to bring into her world” the things that she wants. Since she retired approximately five years ago, Elisabeth reflects on how her life is even more vital because she gets “more choices” and has more control in her life. She doesn’t have to spend “nine to five” at a career, which means she is *free to do what she wants, when she wants*. She reflects “so choices have come into play more than they had when it was my work world.” According to Elisabeth, she feels empowered to live fully currently because having choices means she has to “get up and go” and engage in different things, events and activities which is a large part of her vital life.

Having the choice whether she lives or dies if faced with “an undignified passing” is critical to Elisabeth’s current well-being and vitality. She reflects “I’m not ready to die yet,” however “I just want to know that I have a choice.” She hopes that euthanasia legislation will be organized and passed so that people have the choice of dying with dignity. Having watched her mother’s struggle with Alzheimer’s disease for many years was enough to “break her heart” and form her belief that when a person is “in a vegetative state” with no control over their mind or body they should be helped to die in a dignified manner. Elisabeth states that she would not want “to be a nuisance—taking up space!” Living a vital life is so important to Elisabeth that, in her words, “If I couldn’t be vital or reasonably vital, no thank you! Out I’ll go!” In fact she feels strongly and reflects that faced with an undignified dying and death “It would be vital to me to check out with dignity!”

Keeping Active and Involved by Having and Enjoying Interests

Keeping active and involved by having and enjoying interests have been themes throughout Elisabeth’s life and currently contribute significantly to her ability to have fun and live vitally. She feels that being active at something and getting out and doing things is important for vital living. However, if that is impossible due to ill health or immobility then a person can

still live a vital life by having things brought to them. Elisabeth knows firsthand that active living can also mean reading library books at home, or watching videos or listening to music or having the neighbour in for tea and a chat.

Elisabeth reflects “I like to try new and different things.” *Having diverse interests and being open to new activities* is significant and important for her to maintain her vital life. Her *numerous life experiences* including engaging in activities such as reading and travelling have been major ways that Elisabeth has lived and continues to live a vital life. She enjoys travelling and laughingly notes “I’m glad I did the hard and dirty countries when I did cause I certainly couldn’t go now!” Elisabeth loves to read and comments “I read a lot.” When she reads she “learns something” and she notes “I can lose myself in a book, if I chose to.” For Elisabeth reading is a significant way in which she stimulates and sustains her vital life. She credits an *almost insatiable curiosity* with being the driving force behind her interests. Curiosity is synonymous with vitality in Elisabeth’s opinion. Currently she is excited about and interested in the Olympics. *Doing activities with others and sharing experiences* is fun for Elisabeth and makes her “lively” which to her is being vital. She reflects “lively and vital are very similar in my mind.”

Elisabeth loves music and enjoys going to concerts. She is *interested in all kinds of people from all walks of life* and whenever she can she enjoys attending “speaking series.” She likes cooking and attends cooking classes. As well as participating in organized activities, Elisabeth derives a lot of pleasure and vitality from *being spontaneous and living in the moment*. She reflects “I’m good at being spontaneous.” The few older people she knows who are not living vital lives are not able to be spontaneous. Elisabeth enjoys taking walks around her neighbourhood and community and *being in the moment as she journeys forth*. The exuberance

and excitement that is generated for her when she is spontaneous is palpable in the following description:

If you said to me, “Oh I hear they’re having a sale at Park Royal”... I’d have my coat on faster...that sounds like a fun thing to do, let’s go. Or if they’re having a finger painting class for little children at John Lawson Park, “let’s go and watch them”...And it’s not always doing something like getting on a plane and going somewhere. It’s “Oh, I kind of feel like having Italian for dinner tonight. I wonder what I can whip up.”

Elisabeth finds being spontaneous and living in the moment to be “energizing” and “fun.”

Having a Purpose, Looking forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life are lifelong themes and are critical for Elisabeth’s life to be satisfactory and meaningful. Elisabeth believes she is able to look forward to her life and feel vital in large part because she is *open-minded and open to others*. Elisabeth feels strongly that everybody has a right to their opinions, just as she does, and while she may not agree with certain opinions she *respects other people’s freedom to say what they believe*. Connected to being open-minded is Elisabeth’s perception of herself as fairly non-judgmental of others whether their politics, religion or whatever. She reflects “I would sit and listen and I would try not to be judgmental.” *Listening to others and trying not to be judgmental* is an important way Elisabeth lives vitally. She reflects that looking at other people through a non-judgmental lens makes it possible for her not to carry a “load” of regret or guilt. Elisabeth says that by not judging other people she doesn’t upset them and seldom has to be “apologetic.” *Having few regrets, little guilt and little need to feel she has to apologize to others*, is a critical way Elisabeth feels unburdened and freed to look forward to every day and feel her life is worthwhile.

Elisabeth believes her life is more purposeful and worthwhile because *she is keenly observant about, interested in, and excited about everything around her*. She reflects “I look out the window all the time. But this morning it was different; those flags were there.” Elisabeth experiences the excitement of the Olympics when she observes that the Canadian flags appeared in the windows of the local elementary school. When she walks in her community which is situated by the ocean she notices things and is keenly aware when changes occur. Recently she observed with “amazement” the “beautiful crocuses” near one of the older buildings that is an art gallery. Elisabeth remarked that there had to be “ten thousand crocuses down there!” She considers people who are not observant and “not seeing things that are right under” their noses to lack the ability to observe and to be living non-vitally.

Having goals has been a lifelong theme and currently continues to be important for Elisabeth to feel she has things to look forward to and that she is living a purposeful, productive and worthwhile life. Currently her goals are short term rather than long term, in large part because of her health issues. *Having short term goals* appears to have made Elisabeth more *proactive* and she tends to *not procrastinate quite as much* and “gets on” with things. Throughout her life, Elisabeth has found purpose and a worthwhile life by *getting on with and doing things and working toward something*, no matter how small or large. *Giving her best effort* continues to be something she values deeply and attempts to do in all facets of her life.

Having a passion has been an important way that Elisabeth has felt her life is productive, matters and is worthwhile. She states loud and clear “I’ve still got my passion for women in dentistry!” Along with other colleagues, Elisabeth was instrumental in starting to “fight the battle in the early sixties to get legislation together for standardized treatment and practices” that are now part of her professional organization. As recently as 2007, Elisabeth still took an “active role” as a member of her professional organization and was a member of the group that created a

new constitution. Until this year she worked on “Dental Health Month” which is in April and participated in running “free clinics” for up to 125 patients in one day. The free clinics took care of “acute people” in trauma including street people and low income families. According to Elisabeth *having a passion for her career* gave her “the energy to get up and do it,” a sense of purpose in life and the knowledge that she lived and continues to live a worthwhile life.

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal responsibility is something Elisabeth is faced with every day in large part because of her health problems. Being personally responsible is significant and contributes a great deal to her vital living. Elisabeth is responsible for eating healthily, watching her weight, taking her medication, making and going to doctor’s appointments and, overall, living a life that keeps her stress low thereby sustaining her vitality. She reflects “if I think something’s wrong or I’ve done something wrong, I own it!” *Elisabeth takes responsibility for her words and her actions* which means if she happens to say or do something she feels is hurtful to another person, she apologizes as soon as she can. By apologizing as soon as she can Elisabeth doesn’t spend the early hours of the morning awake and wondering why she said or did something. She comments “and that straps my vitality” and makes it difficult for her to be “perky” and “get on” with what she wants to do.

Elisabeth is *generative*. She is very clear that she has a “general concern for people,” not just her biological family. *Making a contribution that helps make a difference* to family, community, society and the world is extremely important and a deep well from which Elisabeth draws her vitality. Participating in *laying a healthy emotional foundation for children* is very meaningful for Elisabeth and nurtures her vital life. She has a toy box as well as crayons and noisemakers in her home for children of her friends and extended family. The children call her “auntie” and she feels both a responsibility for making their experience with her welcoming and

rich and safe and fun. Elisabeth feels she is contributing in a positive way to their happiness and store of positive memories and, in turn, by being motivated and excited they are contributing to her sense of well-being, all of which fuel her vital life. Another way that Elisabeth *attempts to make a difference for younger generations* is through her philosophy that younger people should have the first opportunity for higher education. She doesn't think it's "fair" for older adults to "take up a seat" in college or university "that could go to somebody that is 25 years younger and has a chance to use that information and is not getting that information just for the sake of getting that information." She comments how a friend of hers got a Master's Degree in her early 60's and "never had the time to use that information professionally."

Taking social responsibility is a lifelong theme for Elisabeth. She has *always volunteered*. Until quite recently she reflects "I was a jack-of-all-trades" when it came to volunteering noting that among other things she was a "fundraiser" and participated in "cops for cancer." Currently, a very meaningful way in which Elisabeth *takes social responsibility* is by being a "teaching patient." As well, she is a participant in research being done at St. Paul's Hospital that is "looking for genetic markers and if they can find a predisposition in a person" for the type of kidney problems that she has. She reflects "it's a little contribution." *By contributing to science* Elisabeth hopes to help younger people before they have the same health problems that she is currently living with. *Contributing to the medical field* is something that both her parents did; her father was "a major blood contributor for years and years and years" and her mother's brain was donated for Alzheimer's research.

While Elisabeth feels that "*giving and receiving*" are important and contribute a lot to vital living she is clear that while "acknowledgement is nice" she doesn't think "everything has to be acknowledged" or reciprocated right away or at all. What she seems to really struggle with is when people "fuss" over her. She becomes "embarrassed" and "overcome" in a negative way

if people go out of their way to show their appreciation for her. For example, when she retired she was given gifts and she did not expect them and she felt this was too much “fussing” over her. In taking personal or social responsibility Elisabeth feels she needs no reward beyond how she feels inside when she is responsible or does a job well. She reflects “I guess I’m pleased within myself...And I don’t need the external patting on the head, so to speak.” Elisabeth is someone who *feels a lot of internal validation for the person she is and the contributions she makes*. She draws a lot of her strength from this knowledge, allowing her to face the challenges of life and reenergize and continue to live vitally.

Having Adequate Financial Security

Having adequate financial security is very important for Elisabeth’s life to continue to be enriched and vital. As far back as she can recall both her nuclear and extended families extolled “own your own real estate.” Owning her own home is very comforting and reassuring for Elisabeth because she reflects “if you own your own land, they can’t take that away from you.” Elisabeth is quite concerned that some of the younger people that she knows are not paying enough attention to planning for a secure financial future. She would advise people in their 40’s and 50’s to do whatever they can to ensure they own a home and have savings if they hope to live a vital life when they are in their 70’s and 80’s. She credits *having a good work ethic* with being largely responsible for her currently having adequate financial resources. She believes that the lack of good work ethic and a tendency toward “laziness” that many younger adults exhibit is setting them up for not having adequate financial resources when they are older and thus not having as vital lives as they could have. So she would advise people in their 40’s and 50’s to continue to work hard and save their money so that their lives will be more vital when they are older adults. She explains her view of the *importance of financial freedom* in the following way:

If you look around and you see older people, you’ll notice that some of them are

just seeming to get by, and then there's Mrs. Diddlewatts with pots of money. I don't think Mrs. Diddlewatts is any happier particularly, and to an extent, they are both vital people, but it would be easier if Mrs. Littlemoney or Nomoney had more to come and go.

Elisabeth knows firsthand that currently having adequate finances means that she doesn't have to "worry about things." *Not worrying about having enough money to maintain her lifestyle* is critical to her well-being and vital living. Presently her apartment building/parking lot are undergoing renovations which are very costly and having the financial means to come up with "ten thousand dollars" to cover her share of the cost meant that she isn't "dragged down" by worry.

Having an adequate financial foundation means that Elisabeth can afford, if and when necessary, things like hearing aids which are "very expensive" and which would help her to continue to "be happy and more vital" if she needed them. Elisabeth notes that her financial budget ensures that she can afford to participate in the activities that she loves and that inspire and excite her such as concerts, speaking series, and cooking classes. Elisabeth is quick to point out that having enough financial resources is "different for everybody" and that *living vitally for her* is not dependent on having "six automobiles" or "25 changes of clothes" or "50 changes of shoes" but *having enough to own the roof over her head, take care of her health and do the things that enrich and make her life full.*

Not Taking Things for Granted, Loss and Accepting Inevitable Changes

Not taking things for granted and feeling fortunate for all the wonderful things in her life past and present brings Elisabeth peace of mind which contributes a lot to her vital life. Elisabeth *feels very blessed and grateful* for the memories that live within her. Over her lifetime Elisabeth has "*accumulated*" *wonderful and profound memories*, creating another foundation that supports

her satisfactory and extremely meaningful life, sustains her well-being and contributes a lot to her vital life, past and present. She has lots of great memories from her career; however, *many of the memories that nurture Elisabeth's current vital life come from childhood*. Living part of the time on Vancouver Island by the ocean in her mother's family's "summer cottage" is something Elisabeth has always treasured and been able to relive through memories. She considers herself to be a water person in large part because of spending so much time at the beach as a child. Elisabeth has warm memories of neighbours who were always helpful and because it was wartime, lots of people were "in the same boat" as Elisabeth and her mother and had loved ones away at war. She reflects "people looked after those that were at home." Elisabeth's experiences were of kindness, commitment to the well-being of others and of being cared for by a community of responsible people. She has comforting and happy memories of growing up with people from all over Canada because of the proximity of their summer cottage to a military airport. These are memories that continue to live within her, bring her joy and sustain her vital life. Currently, Elisabeth *feels deeply blessed* for her parents, extended family, wonderful childhood, friends, and all the people she knows. She is very grateful for the support and love her extended family continues to show her as she experiences health problems. Elisabeth reflects that she has faith and trust in the medical world. She feels fortunate to have a good medical system, outstanding medical support and good people working in that system and that she receives excellent medical care.

Elisabeth continues to derive a vital life because *she accepts* that because of the changes she experiences because of her life threatening health problems *she needs support and she welcomes this support in her life* and the "interactions" with others that it provides. She understands and accepts the *importance of interdependence* in order for her to continue to live as independently as she does. For example, somebody brings her groceries and/or medications, she

has help with housework, and she has a nurse come by when needed. Elisabeth *welcomes this support.*

Elisabeth has experienced a lot of loss in more recent years. Both her parents are dead, as are older members of her extended families. Significant life threatening health problems and surgery have been a fact of her life since she retired from her career. *While Elisabeth is aware of her mortality she doesn't worry or ruminate about what will happen.* There is "a history of serious dementia or Alzheimer's" in Elisabeth's family and currently she feels that if the scientific establishment can come up with more definitive research regarding the markers for Alzheimer's she'll "be tested." Presently she's not ready to know if she will get the disease noting "I don't want to know! Yet."

Metaphor for Living Vitally

Elisabeth's metaphor for currently living a vital life is "If there's no wind, everybody row." In her words:

...if something's not happening then you've got to get busy and everybody's got to help...it takes a village to raise a child...I think that's true of most things. It takes a lot of pieces to make a something. And I think my life is like that.

Elisabeth views being vital as a "cumulative effect" of all her life experiences and "all the pieces" that make her the person she currently is. According to Elisabeth her ability to live a rich life currently is a result of "all the vital things she did which continue to see her in good stead and make her vital." She further reflects on the many things that contribute to her ability to live vitally at almost 70 years of age including "my surroundings, the people I surround myself with, the community I surround myself with, the activities I do." Elisabeth is clear that she can't live a meaningful and vital life alone. She notes "And I need all those people rowing the boat!" She

explains that not being engaged with others and not working together with others would be boring, devoid of fun and non-vital.

Shirley: Passionate About Living a Life of Self-Examination

Shirley is an 80 year old retired music teacher and business woman who has been divorced for 37 years, is the mother of a daughter aged 60 years and two sons aged 59 and 58 years, a grandmother of five, and soon to be great grandmother. Shirley's narration of her experiences of living vitally as an older adult mainly contains lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in her current life as well as a few themes that have emerged more recently. After being asked the question, "**How are you living a vital life?**" and "**What does living a vital life mean to you?**" Shirley responded intensely, energetically, and with deep reflection and a lot of self-examination. Throughout many of Shirley's themes of living a vital life is threaded the profound influence of her father.

Living a Principled Life and Self-Examination

Shirley was born into a devout Catholic family in Detroit, Michigan, USA, the second oldest of six children, five girls and one boy. Shirley reflected that she always had a very close relationship with her father, leading to his having a profound influence on her ability to live vitally. She credits him with not only providing an exemplary model as someone who lived a life of self-examination, but also "imbuing" in her "*those very strong principles*" she believes are "*the essence of what is important in her life*" and are "*fulfilling*" and necessary for a vital life. Her father taught her that "if you decide to do something, you do have to give it some thought in terms of how it affects other people. And in the way you comport yourself, as well, in accomplishing whatever you choose!" When Shirley was five years old her family moved to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada and her father started a grocery business, eventually expanding

the business into a “little shopping plaza.” “We weren’t rich! But we were comfortable,” notes Shirley.

Shirley’s life story of *self-examination, including questioning and the quest for understanding*, has been profound. Self-examination has ensured a meaningful life for Shirley in the past and present. She describes a self-examined life as “stepping back from a situation and reassessing herself and how she’s doing” and asking herself “am I making progress or am I in kind of a rut?” In reflecting on the importance of self-examination, Shirley says “If you don’t understand yourself, I don’t think you’re going to understand things...or the people around you.” At 80 years of age Shirley still actively engages in a process of taking stock of herself, including her actions and her feelings, to determine what she needs to do or not do to bring about positive change. This is essential for her to live a vital life. She reflects that through self-examination, life is now “teaching her to deal with emotions” and “how to be strong or weak” and that “*nothing is for a certainty!*” In order to live meaningful and vital lives as older adults, Shirley would advise people in their 50’s to “know” themselves, reflecting “you have to know yourself before you can know anything else.”

Lifelong Learning and Education

Lifelong learning and education, both formal and informal, are themes that have been pivotal throughout Shirley’s life and currently continue to provide interest and vitality and meaning to her life. Very early in her childhood, Shirley *learned to use her brain* as much as she possibly could. Currently she stresses *the importance of keeping mentally fit* in order to live vitally, exclaiming “You have to keep your brain working!” Shirley reflects further that having an “active brain” ensures that she will “always find something” to do that is meaningful for her and that sustains her vitality. Shirley reflects that growing up with her father was “a continuous education” and “very, very satisfying” for her. Shirley credits the way her father “*lived his life*”

as being the cornerstone of her strength to live a fulfilled and vital life in the past and in the present by nurturing her strong character and her “insatiable desire to be educated.”

From her father, Shirley says she learned to *live life as “a constant exploration,” respect and love nature, be curious, and be involved and interested in life*. These themes weave throughout her life and contribute currently to her well-being, happiness and vital living. Her father was also instrumental in sparking and developing Shirley’s *love and passion for music* which continues currently. Shirley’s elementary and high school years were spent in a private Catholic school. At seventeen years of age she arrived in Toronto to begin university. Shirley reflected “I can remember when I was in university, I couldn’t get enough of it! I just loved so much, learning.” Shirley graduated with a degree in music from the music program at the University of Toronto at 20 years of age and got married shortly after that. Later on, when she was in her 40’s, Shirley studied “*existentialism*” at UBC, and this philosophy continues to be a source from which she draws knowledge, strength, inspiration and vitality.

Intertwined with using her brain, lifelong learning and education, along with music is *reading*, the other “big” passion in Shirley’s life. Shirley notes “I’m a *fanatic reader*” and “I seem to go toward the brain stuff.” By this she means that she reads mostly non-fiction, for example, the writings of Nietzsche. Like music, reading “sustains,” strengthens,” and “revitalizes” Shirley. She notes that her “down time” is reading poetry, for example, “Shakespeare’s sonnets” or more recently, “the Persian poets.” Shirley is a passionate advocate for people to “*exercise*” their “*brain power*” before they become older adults. She would encourage people who are middle-aged to “read a lot” because they can learn so much about life from reading. Shirley is confident that even at eighty a person who reads will be gaining the information and knowledge to say “I would like to do that. I would like to volunteer to do this.”

Shirley believes that reading, at any age, and continuing to exercise the power of the brain “opens up so many doors” into a vital life.

The Importance of Routines and Ongoing Interests

Having and developing interests are themes that resonate throughout Shirley’s life and contribute to a life that is meaningful, satisfying and vital. Her interests are extremely diverse. Shirley believes that *having a routine and keeping varied activities going every day* significantly increase her capacity for living a vital life. First thing in the morning she reads the *Globe and Mail* “from cover to cover.” Shirley keeps “current of all world affairs” which she considers to be “a vital part” of her life, and while “not a technical person,” she enjoys reading about technology. She is keenly interested in BC’s school system and keeps abreast of what is working and not working well. Currently, Shirley is a member of an orchestra that is “mandated to play [concerts] in seniors’ homes and hospitals.” Shirley views this as “a very vital” part of her life because she “learns more than she gives.” Shirley is also a member of the strata council in the building in which she lives.

Persevering and seeing things through are themes that have enabled Shirley to be involved in interesting activities and have sustained Shirley throughout her life to live vitally. Working hard at both practical and creative endeavours and persevering and *giving good effort and doing a good job*, have served Shirley well in living a meaningful and vital life. Learning a musical instrument helped Shirley develop the foundations of *a strong work ethic and self-discipline*, themes that have resonated throughout her 80 years and continue presently. Currently, having self-discipline enables Shirley to stop herself from doing things that she considers “dissipating” and likely to rob her of her energy and attention span, like watching television for endless hours. According to Shirley, having self-discipline propels her to see things through. This is especially significant and vital for Shirley at 80 years of age because she tires more easily

and having self-discipline ensures that she “makes” herself get out and do the things she needs to do including going to orchestra practice even when she feels tired.

Shirley recognizes that currently she needs to add something more to her repertoire of interests to boost her vitality and well-being, and she wants the activity to be something that “contributes to the community.” Upon self-examination and with encouragement from her oldest son, she realizes that she needs to engage more with others in her community. Shirley acknowledges that in order to add to her well-being and vitality *her new activity has to be something that she finds interesting, challenging and enjoyable*. She is currently looking into where she can do volunteer work that encompasses her love of the “cultural” world and her knowledge of art history and/or books. Shirley believes that adults in their 50’s need to be developing interests that will sustain them and keep them engaged if they intend to live meaningful and vital lives as they age.

Carrying On and Coping With Life’s Challenges

When Shirley was asked to explore the challenges she faces at 80 years of age, she said, “You know what, I don’t think they change that much” throughout life. Shirley got married at 20 years of age, began married life in Toronto and raised three children there. *Her marriage and the toll it took on her was a huge challenge* in Shirley’s life. She describes having “a very unhappy married life” because her husband “was a womanizer.” Shirley experienced a lot of humiliation, demeaning, and betrayal throughout her marriage but it went against her lifelong principles to give up on the relationship. According to Shirley, the marriage was especially “destructive” for her because she was “always doing things that she thought that person wanted her to do rather than what she really felt in herself she should be doing.” She feels that she was wasn’t being her genuine self in the relationship and instead was “making” herself “a victim!” She says “that relationship damaged me a little bit” and “left its mark. She says that she “committed” to a

“toxic” marriage and that she lost her “core” self in the process. She reflects “it may be why I never married again.”

Being a victim was an aberration for Shirley because she was raised “*not to be a victim.*” Shirley notes that if she was “not controlling” her own life” she was “living as a victim” which was neither meaningful nor vital. Shirley comments on how all of her life, she “*always fought against*” allowing herself to become what she describes as a “*non-entity,*” and how this fight was particularly difficult during and after her marriage. However, Shirley didn’t fall apart. She *carried on* teaching music and raising her own children while also fostering a little boy. Shirley also volunteered working with seniors and children with Downs’ Syndrome.

Carrying on, no matter what life tosses your way is a lifelong theme for Shirley and very relevant in her current life. Shirley recalls her 97 year old mother’s wise words to her: “you have to keep going, keep going.” By *not allowing herself to be “a victim,” not feeling sorry for herself,* and by *re-engaging in life with determination and zest,* Shirley is maintaining her well-being and vitality. *Doing things to the best of her ability and stubbornness or tenacity and determination* are lifelong themes and characteristics that are very important for Shirley, adding to her ability to live vitally. She reflects on having a book of poems by Dylan Thomas and having marked the following lines:”Do not go down...Rage, rage, against the dying of the light” as illustrative of her unwillingness to give up on anything, including life. Shirley feels that an important source from which she has always derived strength to feel comforted, live vitally and cope with the challenges of life is her belief in *spirituality*. Shirley reflects that while she is no longer “a practicing Catholic” she thinks “*a lot of times, there’s someone up there looking after me.*”

“*Acceptance*” is a theme that Shirley feels is crucial for her well-being and continued vitality. She acknowledges that if she *accepts all aspects of life, including what is good and what*

is bad, it will mean to her that “she has accepted life” and that will remove an emotional weight from her shoulders. Over her lifetime, she has come to accept many difficult and painful life happenings and experiences including the deaths of her parents, the demise of her marriage and the inevitability of her own mortality. Shirley remembers reflecting to her good friend N., about the importance of accepting the inevitability that life is going to throw difficult, agonizing and frightening challenges at you with the critical thing being to understand that challenges and problems are a necessary part of being alive. She reflects “we know we’re living when we can be hurt! When we can be happy!” Her philosophy for coping with life’s challenges and living vitally is “if you have a choice to live, live that part, take part in it, fix it, or discard it.”

Recently Shirley has been faced with what she refers to as “little bouts of depression” because she believes she *cannot accept or resolve* two long term challenges. One challenge is that Shirley feels that her relationship with her daughter has been strained off-and-on and not as close as she wants, as a result of the divorce 35 years ago. According to Shirley, the second challenge is that she continues to struggle to accept and forgive her ex-husband for the role he played in the breakup of their marriage. Shirley eloquently reflects on how she is at a point in her life now where she wants to accept or resolve these challenges in order not to have her sense of “psychological” well-being and vital living threatened. Shirley feels that either *healing broken relationships or accepting that they can’t be healed* and “letting go” is critical to her emotional well-being and vital living. Being a lifelong “*problem-solver*,” Shirley is “trying to figure out” how she can feel better. Shirley recognizes that she needs to *reach out to others* for companionship and advice before she starts to feel sad. *Being proactive* is critical in order for Shirley to live vitally. By being proactive, Shirley feels she faces her problems or issues, addresses them and then takes the necessary action/s to alleviate them, things that support and help her to not feel down or depressed.

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal responsibility for her children and herself is an important lifelong theme and principle in Shirley's life, although *in late adulthood Shirley recognizes that her responsibility is more and more about taking care of herself*. According to Shirley, she waited until her children were self-sufficient before she separated from her husband because she felt that *her children were her responsibility*. Even though Shirley says her marriage was "toxic" for years, she felt the more responsible course of action for the sake of her children's well-being was for her to remain married until they were old enough to look after themselves. Shirley comments that what she learned from her divorce that allows her to live a vital and meaningful life today, is that I, *"I have to look after myself; I have to take responsibility for myself!"* Shirley took control of her life and did what was necessary for her to live a fulfilling life, including furthering her education and developing marketable skills, using the services of a financial advisor, and joining an orchestra. Currently, Shirley sees her responsibility as she ages as *"keeping herself healthy" and "active"* to be able to live vitally for as long as she can.

Shirley has *enjoyed excellent health* throughout her life and this is a theme that continues currently. According to Shirley she currently has no medical conditions and takes no medications. She is cognizant that having good health contributes greatly to her ability to live a vital and active life. Shirley recognizes that "part of her preparation" for her future aging is that she may have to *practice more self-care and look after her health*. *"Keeping active, physically"* is also a lifelong theme that continues presently and contributes to Shirley's well-being and vital living. For Shirley, *keeping active physically* does not mean organized exercise or fitness, *but rather engaging in activities that get her up and about*. Shirley laughingly declares "I deplore exercise of any kind."

Approximately four years ago, at 96 years of age, Shirley's mother was diagnosed with kidney failure. Shirley and three of her sisters, living in various parts of Canada and the United States, took turns looking after their mother because "she wanted to die in her own home." *Being conscientious and caring for* her mother became a story of *seeing something through until the end*, a theme that continues to resonate in Shirley's life and contributes to her vital life. Those final months with her mother allowed for both *memory-making and the reliving of experiences and memories of "great times" they had shared* throughout their life. Good memories sustain Shirley's well-being and vitality in older adulthood. Giving of herself to others is particularly critical for Shirley's well-being and vital living now because, in her heart, *both the giving and the satisfaction gained from giving are reasons "for living into old age."* Shirley believes it is her responsibility to burden her children as little as possible as she ages. She notes that she has a will and has stipulated "no life support." Shirley views this proactive stance as lessening the load on her family should she become critically ill or incapacitated. It's important for Shirley to take responsibility for her own life so that her family isn't burdened with too much decision-making responsibility for her if she is no longer able to act and make decisions on her own behalf.

Taking social responsibility for helping and giving back to the community and those less fortunate is a lifelong theme that continues to be important in Shirley's life, in order for her to sustain her well-being and live a satisfying life. Shirley reflects that her father was the "only person in Dartmouth who would serve the black people who came into his grocery store." Shirley narrates a pivotal and moving story of learning the importance of social responsibility when, as an adolescent, she would help her father deliver free groceries from his store every Friday night after closing to residents of Preston, a "very poor" community of black people living on the outskirts of Dartmouth. Shirley recalls that this act of giving was "never mentioned" by her father; "he never told anybody." Shirley notes that in order to "*be a whole*

person” it is “important to her own development” to give back to others without any thought of personal gain. Shirley credits her lifelong belief in volunteering and being involved in community and society as being fostered and modelled by her father. Upon moving to BC in her early 40’s, Shirley volunteered at a hospital for children with physical disabilities.

Financial Security and Freedom

After her divorce Shirley was faced with the challenge of how to ensure that she would have adequate finances to take care of herself. According to Shirley, in her early 40’s she became aware of the necessity to have enough funds to not just exist but to live an enjoyable and vital life. She believes that having enough financial security in older adulthood makes living a vital life “easier” because it means she “doesn’t have to worry about it.” Worrying would decrease her vitality. However, Shirley is also very clear about how she defines “enough.” As a single woman, Shirley is aware that she “lives below the level of a married couple” where finances are concerned. Long before her retirement, Shirley planned and calculated how much she would have to pay in mortgage payments so her mortgage would be paid off upon her retirement. However, she realizes that she’s currently “approaching the time when she thinks she’s going to live longer than her money is.” Being a proactive person and a problem-solver, Shirley’s “in the process now of” revisiting her expenses and needs currently and for the future, and making the necessary changes to make her finances last longer. She says “I would hate to give up my symphony tickets” but reflects that if she had to, she would compensate by “buying a disc, you know, a CD for 15 dollars and listen to that, if I need to.” Shirley believes that by being “creative about what she wants to do” she can live meaningfully on less money than she has had to this point. This is a theme that has played out throughout her life. She notes that she’s “educated her brain to enjoy various things that don’t cost money,” including activities like “walking” and being with other people through “playing bridge” and “volunteering.”

Shirley's advice, especially to women in their 50's who want to live vitally in older adulthood, would be to make sure that they are *aware of their financial situation, have control of their own finances and establish their own capacity for financial independence*. She has personally witnessed the financial hardships so many women of her generation endured because they had inadequate knowledge about finances and were dependent on their spouses financially.

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Family interaction and support is crucial in ensuring Shirley's well-being and vitality. Shirley believes her three children and five grandchildren are "a support system" for her, more and more, as she ages. For Shirley, having a family support system "*shows somebody cares about her.*" *Being cared about, "provides"* Shirley with "*a bit of a safety factor.*" For example, if Shirley's family didn't hear from her for "a length of time...they would come and want to know why they didn't hear from me." Knowing this provides "*some consolation*" for her at her age; "*there is a comfort that I'm really not alone.*" Upon further reflection, Shirley recognizes that having a feeling of "*security*" that a family member would "look after me if I required that...frees me up to enjoy other things." Shirley says, "I have fairly good relationships with my children" and "constant contact with my sisters" even though they live throughout Canada and the United States. According to Shirley, having family relationships reflects "history," "intensity," ups-and-downs," and "all the things that have happened" within a family. These lifelong rich family experiences nurture Shirley's vitality.

Shirley loves all three of her children, and would *like close and connected relationships* with all of them. She notes, however, that she has the deepest connection and closest and most supportive relationship with her oldest son, M., with whom she has "a lot in common." They have *open and honest communication and "very good conversations"* with each other, all of which are important for Shirley, contribute to her vitality, and are themes that have been constant

throughout her life. Shirley notes *her divorce* “caused tremendous upheaval in the family” and how “it’s never healed” which she feels caused her daughter and younger son to “side” more with their father. As a result, her relationship with them is not as close as with her oldest son. Currently, Shirley describes her relationship with her daughter as being “on the outs!” Shirley recognizes her own “faults” which exacerbate the rift in their relationship and says “I’m not putting it [the blame] all on her.” Shirley asks, “I’m the mother; am I supposed to be more tolerant?” Then she wonders whose responsibility it is to heal the relationship. At the beginning of her ninth decade, Shirley feels that *her life would be even more vital if she had a closer relationship with her daughter*. On a positive note, through all the ups-and-downs, Shirley reflects that her daughter and she have “kept a relationship going.” Currently, Shirley is examining and questioning how to either *accept* the relationship she has with her daughter or attempt to heal it.

Social interaction and relationships outside her immediate family also play a significant role in contributing to Shirley’s ability to live a vital life. She believes that it is *important to be “open” and try “to listen to what other people have to say.”* The orchestra Shirley is a member of, provides a venue for her to engage or “mix” with a larger group of people. *Maintaining long term friendships* is also very important for Shirley’s well-being and vitality. “I think if you have a couple of true friends in your life, you’re very fortunate,” reflects Shirley. Having loyal and trusted friends allows Shirley to “vent about things I probably wouldn’t vent to my family about!” Shirley’s long term friends are also vital living people and share many of her “passions.” Her friends have supported Shirley through hard times and she is very appreciative of their help. *Having to engage with people, “to get out and be around people,” even people she doesn’t know*, also contributes a lot to living a meaningful and vital life for Shirley. Her ability to strike up conversations with strangers energizes her.

Being selective is a theme which is currently very important in order for Shirley to keep her emotional and energy levels full and continue to live a vital life. While Shirley believes relationships with family and friends are important, *she is selective about the people with whom she invests her time and energy, and with whom she shares her “self.”* When she was younger, Shirley enjoyed volunteering helping senior citizens living in care facilities. However, she now reflects “I find now, at my age, I don’t want to be around senior citizens that are whining and complaining and not trying to do anything. Because I think I would find that depressing.” At 80 years of age, it is important for Shirley to be with people, one-on-one and in groups, who “want to do something.” Life experience (i.e., her marriage and divorce) has taught Shirley the necessity of *sifting out “toxic” relationships* in order to be emotionally, mentally, and physically vital. Through her own personal experiences, Shirley has learned that “toxic relationships have decreased her vitality and well-being because they made her do things that went against her values and principles.

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life continue to be themes Shirley values and believes imbue her life with meaning and vitality. Shirley says she “*always looks forward*” to going to orchestra on Friday mornings. *Having something to look forward too* is a consistent theme throughout Shirley’s life and is especially important for her now. Currently, she is preparing to spend time at a university in Seattle, playing her music, something she has done and enjoyed doing for the past 10 summers. *Being open to and embracing new experiences* are themes that continue to sustain and enhance Shirley’s love for life and sense of her life as being exciting and worthwhile. *Having passion for and being excited by life and living in the moment* are critical for Shirley’s sense of her life being purposeful and worthwhile. Shirley reflects that she *doesn’t “think she’s changed very much” over her lifetime,*

believing that she has always lived a vital life and has *lived passionately in the moment* since her childhood.

Shirley feels that *having something to be passionate about* is akin to having something to look forward to, thereby fuelling her vital life. “*Music is the center of my soul*” comments Shirley. Her lifelong *passion for music* is a theme that is still playing out in, and contributing immensely to, her sense of living a purposeful and worthwhile life. She notes that “music is a “very, very important part of my life because it feeds the emotions.” Shirley’s passion for music was rooted in her music-making family. Her parents both played instruments and, at five years of age, Shirley’s father bought her a violin and she began taking music lessons. For Shirley, playing and listening to music is deeply spiritual and “emotional.” Shirley reflected that music feels like a “consolation or a strength” to her. She says “once I pick up that violin...everything else is gone! Nothing comes into that world there!...I can lose myself in something like that.” Upon further reflection, Shirley “interprets” the power and strength of music as being “a safety valve” and somewhere that she can “withdraw” to and “find more strength.” In music, Shirley finds the strength to come back at life again and again and again and feels a sense of “*inner peace*” that is *deeply “satisfying”* for her. She is excited and passionate about life and says she doesn’t just want to “go along” with life.

Shirley is *very generative*. Being generative ensures she has a purpose in life and that her life has been and continues to be worthwhile. It is very important and meaningful for Shirley to *have taken care of and continue to take care of the generations that came after her*. She has shown her caring financially, both with her children and her grandchildren. She has shown her caring by teaching her children and grandchildren important life principles and values, especially giving back to community and society. Shirley feels she has helped her daughter and her youngest son immensely by being available to help them care for her grandchildren. When,

approximately five years ago, her daughter was “paralyzed from the waist down” and “in a wheel chair for six months,” Shirley took on a great deal of responsibility and put a lot of emotional and physical energy into ensuring her grandchildren’s lives were disrupted as little as possible. She says “I got up at five o’clock everyday and went up there at six o’clock in the morning” in order to get her son-in-law off to work and “pack the kid’s lunches, drive them to school, pick them up” and “take them to their basketball.” Shirley “did that every single day for six months” and she says she did it “gladly!”

Shirley also *showed a lifelong willingness to care for the next generations, including those not biologically related to her*, when she fostered a child while living in Toronto. Reflecting on how taking care of the younger generations contributes to her ability to live vitally, Shirley replies that “it’s still part of being a woman” and that she believes “women have that innate sense of caring.” She notes further, “*if you’re a mother; you’re always a mother*” and that is an important part of a purposeful, worthwhile and vital life for Shirley. However, having invested so much caring into the younger generations also comes with a price and that price is that now that Shirley’s grandchildren are grown, “I don’t have that contact with them I used to have when they were growing up!” This is somewhat bittersweet for Shirley. Shirley believes in *reciprocity* and she is certain that because she has cared well for the younger generations, they would care for her, both financially and emotionally, if that was ever required. Shirley reflects on how some older adults who are alone as they age may not have been generative and not established, over their lifetime, an ethic of caring for their children and grandchildren.

A Sense of Personal Agency

Having a sense of personal agency is a theme that has been *of utmost importance* in Shirley’s life *since she separated from and divorced her husband in her early 40’s*. Shirley’s ability to live a vital life then and currently was greatly dependent on her *taking charge of her*

life and empowering herself. When she separated from her husband she reflects on thinking “how am I going to live? What am I going to do for money?” However, approximately one year after her divorce Shirley remembers waking up one morning and thinking “I can handle this. I’ve got a job. I’m going to school.” *Just doing the things she had to do* in order to survive financially and carry on with her life were the first steps Shirley took towards empowering herself. “*Finding out that she could do it*” was a “big discovery” for Shirley and is a significant factor in her current ability to live vitally. After her divorce, Shirley began to *take control of her life* and became *responsible for her own life and happiness*. She began to *manage her own life*. First Shirley found a job as a “filing clerk” and then she decided that it would be a wise career move to get a “business degree,” paid for by her company. She went to college and completed a three year “business administration certificate in only two years.” Being empowered to take control of her life and *being successful* was instrumental in the *growth of Shirley’s self-confidence* and contributed greatly to her vital life in the past and currently.

“*Having control*” of her “*own life*” for as long as is possible is very empowering for Shirley and contributes greatly to her current sense of satisfaction and vitality. Shirley reflects on her younger sister’s having taken control of her life and believing she has choices even with the challenge of living with a terminal illness. This inspires Shirley to be *aware of the choices and control she has* in her current life which sustains her sense of personal agency. “*Decision making*” is important and “a vital part of my life” declares Shirley. It is a theme that continues to play out in Shirley’s life, remind her that she “is in control of her life,” and is critical in contributing to her agency, fulfillment, well-being and vital living. Shirley’s advice to people who are in their 50’s and want to be vitally engaged in living when they are older adults is to take control of themselves and manage their own lives, understanding that their lives will never be “smooth.” Shirley believes that for vital and agentic living in older adulthood it is critical for

middle-aged people to *think ahead, to plan, to take advantage of choices, and to develop interests and skills needed to pursue those interests*. Shirley's sense of personal agency is also reflected in her *reinvention of her life after her divorce* and in *taking actions*, currently, to continue to empower herself to "*accept her life,*" while also *continuing to try to make positive changes when necessary*.

Being forthright and honestly expressing her opinions are qualities that have blossomed for Shirley in later adulthood and are pivotal for her to be able to currently live a vital life. She doesn't believe in mincing words or sparing hurt feelings, especially when she feels it is important to encourage others to take action to help themselves. Shirley explains that her forthrightness, honesty, and expressing her opinions come from a well-meaning place and are meant to support and encourage others to be more proactive. For Shirley, expressing her opinions goes hand-in-hand with being forthright and honest. This includes expressing her opinions about the importance of values and principles, the Olympics, politics, relationships, the education system, and so forth. Shirley notes "I write letters to the CBC. I write letters you know. I've always done that!" Shirley says that she is *more inclined as an older adult "to say and do what I want"* and this is empowering and important for her to continue to live vitally.

Having a positive attitude and an optimistic outlook on life are themes Shirley feels bolster her sense of agency and fuel her vital life. She reflects that at the beginning of her ninth decade *she has to work harder to maintain her positive attitude*. She looks to her sister, who is living with a terminal illness, and her oldest son for inspiration. Shirley recalls her sister recently saying, "When I wake up in the morning now, I decide I'm going to have a good day," and Shirley "tries to emulate that spirit." Shirley shares her son's example of being positive when she says that "before he goes to sleep at night, he tries to think of two nice things that happened that day," and she notes that she is also aspiring to do this. She explains that a large part of her

positive attitude comes from knowing that she *can be “depended on”* by others and that she won’t let them down.

Tied into having a positive attitude and personal agency is Shirley’s belief that everything she attempts in life is done with *commitment, enthusiasm, passion and love*, themes that have played out over her lifespan. *Having a sense of humour* is an important part of Shirley’s positive outlook on life. It is a theme that has resonated throughout her life and currently continues to empower her to *not take herself so seriously* thereby enhancing her emotional health and vital life. Shirley says, “You have to laugh! Laughing is so important...Yeah, you have to laugh at yourself.” Shirley explains that the ability to laugh, while seemingly a small thing to some people, is important for her because it brings “*a sense of balance into her life*” and helps her “really understand that not everything is so important.” Shirley reflects that having this *balance stops her from dwelling or ruminating on the little things*.

Loving being a woman and enjoying the freedom associated with being single are themes that have resonated throughout her adulthood and currently contribute a lot to sustaining Shirley’s personal agency and vitality. Shirley declares that she “*loves being a woman.*” She loves “the strength” she has in being a woman. At 80 years of age, Shirley is an attractive and vibrant woman who is not “really not looking for a relationship...*I really like my life the way it is.*” For Shirley, being single at 80 years of age provides her with “a certain freedom” which is empowering and contributes to her being able to live a vital life. Shirley comments that being with a member of the opposite sex is an opportunity for her to have “fun” and to “flirt” which she finds “exciting” and life-affirming. Shirley says she revels in the “male-female interaction” which brings a sense of fun and liveliness and excitement into her life, all things which build her confidence and feed her agentic and vital life.

Shirley thinks that some older adults who she knows who are not living vital lives are lacking a sense of personal agency and are “*in a rut*,” and say things like, “Gee, I’m 80 years old; it’s all over! I can’t do this” or, “I don’t want to do it.” People she knows or hears about who aren’t living meaningful and vital lives *seem to have given up and aren’t trying anymore*. According to Shirley, they are negative about life and don’t feel they have much control or choices. Shirley also thinks that some of the people she knows who aren’t living vitally are *self-isolating*. She believes that older adults need to “*expose*” themselves to their communities and society as a whole; they need to be empowering themselves to be out in society, whatever their age.

Feeling Fortunate for Her Life, Loss, Acceptance and Adapting to Change

Shirley feels *fortunate for the many experiences throughout her life, both good and bad*, and her three children, especially her oldest son, M. who is “such a continual support” to her. She is also very grateful for the love and support of her five grandchildren. Since her retirement at 65 years of age, Shirley has looked back and thought, “Would I have done anything differently?” Her answer is “no!” She acknowledges that even her “failed marriage” which caused her so much pain “taught her so much.” Shirley recognizes and is grateful for her childhood and the principles her father “imbued” in her by his living example and for the opportunities she had while growing up to develop her character. She is very appreciative of having learned to be a keen observer early on in childhood. These are abilities that nurture her well-being, vitality and interest in life. Shirley is deeply grateful for her father’s influence in developing her mind in such a way that she is “willing to look” at and experience the world in the way Louis Armstrong describes in his song, “*It’s a Wonderful World*.” She is appreciative of the community she lives in and is passionate about how “lucky” she feels to live in Canada. Shirley is adamant that she *does not take any of this for granted!*

Acknowledging and accepting that illness and/or disability is a possibility and death is inevitable, but not dwelling on her own mortality, is important for Shirley to live a vital life. Because Shirley uses her mind and her brain so much, she says “if I were incapacitated in any way, if I ended up in a wheelchair...then I would still have that ability—unless I were brain damaged—to still have a *useful life*.” Shirley believes that she would be able to *adapt* and still live a useful or vital life if she was physically disabled, because her brain would continue to be alert. While Shirley notes that she “*finds the aging process...interesting*” she also understands the *importance of compensation* for vital living as she ages. She is adamant that “If I didn’t have the music, I know I’d be doing volunteer work again.” Shirley feels that if she is unable to do something she loves such as her music she would compensate for this loss by doing something else that is meaningful for her, such as volunteer work.

The reality of *loss through physical and/or mental decline, illness and death* is more and more prevalent in Shirley’s awareness as she lives into her ninth decade. Although Shirley’s physical health is excellent and her memory is still serving her well, she acknowledges experiencing some “aches and pains” and needing to create ways to remind herself to remember to do some things. She is also witnessing more incidence of dementia in friends and/or their spouses. As well, more people of her age are becoming ill and dying. *Accepting that death is inevitable and a natural part of living* contributes to Shirley’s ability to live vitally at the dawn of her ninth decade.

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

When asked for a metaphor to describe living vitally in later life, Shirley, after a short pause, says “*butterflies are free*.” She says that “*really trying to do something with her life*” and *putting some effort into trying to shape herself and her life and trying to be good to people around her*” is freeing because she can honestly say to herself “I’m really trying to do something

with my life.” *Empowering herself to be free* and continuing to do something with her life enhances Shirley’s ability to “have a passion for living” at 80 years of age.

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

Shirley chose two photographs that represent why she believes she is able to live meaningfully and vitally at her current stage of life. One photograph shows Shirley as a child with her father on Citadel Hill in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The other photograph is “just kind of a portrait photograph” of her father which reflects “the way he conducted himself” and “the way he dressed which was a wee bit ahead of his time.” Looking at the pictures and reflecting on how they represent her ability to live a vital life, Shirley muses on how “proud” she was of her father because of his appearance, but even deeper was her pride in him “*because he always wanted to try new things. And he wasn’t afraid to experiment or be rejected!*” Both photographs are a reflection for Shirley of what her father modelled for her: a love for learning and a “*willingness to try anything,*” values she has embodied and which have “stayed with her all her life, and are still important to her today.” *A willingness “to sort of stick her neck out a bit, and try new things or look for opportunities to try new things”* is very important and meaningful for Shirley. Upon further reflection, Shirley acknowledges that throughout her life, *experiences, both positive and negative*, have been “learning experiences” and they have all *played a role in contributing to the person she is today* and in her ability to lead a meaningful and vital life past and present.

Jean: Transforming, Living Life as an “Open Book” and Connecting Deeply With Others

Jean is a 71 year old former laboratory technician, wife of J. for 14 years, mother of a daughter aged 34 years, and grandmother of an infant. Jean’s narration of her experiences of living vitally as an older adult contains lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in her current life as well as newer themes that have evolved in her 40’s, 50’s, 60’s and 70’s. After being asked the questions: “**How are you living a vital life?**” and “**What does living a vital life**

mean to you?” Jean paused to gather her thoughts and then launched into her narrative in a self-honest and, at times, fiery and/or funny but always passionate manner.

The Importance of Satisfying, Connected and Sharing Relationships

Having close, caring and sharing relationships is a very important way in which Jean feels both supported by and supportive of others. This deep connection with others is absolutely critical for her life to be meaningful and thus vital. Jean considers *connecting with others* to be the major way she continues to live vitally. Throughout her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood Jean always felt close to and supported by her father but the loving and supportive relationship with her mother that she always longed for was missing. Jean was born (delivered by her “granny”) on the family’s homestead in 1939 in Saskatchewan. She had an older brother who died in his 50s and a younger brother who died a few hours after birth. Her parents were farmers during the “dirty thirties” and were not able to eke out a living so Jean’s father would spend the winter months working at a copper mine in Ontario in order to subsidize the family’s income. While her dad was away a hired hand whom Jean refers to as “this old man from Europe” stayed with Jean’s family. Jean, tearing up and becoming “emotional,” revealed that as a toddler, still sleeping in her crib, she was “molested” by this man. According to Jean this traumatic event was never repeated but it profoundly affected her childhood, adolescence and adulthood. She believes that her relationship with, and connection to, her mother was strained and “not the tender, loving kind” in large part due to her mother not knowing what happened to Jean and thus, “not being there for her” emotionally. Jean also did not have a close relationship with her brother and she recalls how much she resented the time her mother would spend helping him with schoolwork and giving him the attention that Jean feels she never got.

Jean’s first marriage lasted 15 years but was never the close, tender, and connected relationship that she had hoped for. The marriage resulted in a daughter for Jean. Having

suffered a great deal of pain from a lack of connection with her mother, Jean was determined to have a much closer relationship with her daughter. Jean's *relationship with her daughter* has been and continues to be a source of love and connection for Jean which is integral to her well-being and has contributed a great deal to her being able to live a vital life in the past and present. For Jean *a vital life is "more about connection with people" than anything else*. Jean is thrilled to be a first time grandmother of an eight month old infant and notes that *her granddaughter has brought joy and energy into her life*. Since her granddaughter was born, Jean has been seeing a lot more of her daughter. Already this year, they have visited Jean twice and Jean has gone to Ontario once and will be going again in May.

Approximately 20 years ago Jean "got together" with her current husband. When reflecting on the success of their relationship she notes "I stopped looking at the outer package and saw the inner package." *Jean and her husband are compatible in many of their interests and have a close, respectful, communicative and loving relationship*. Over the past 20 years, Jean has learned the art of "compromise." In order to have a loving, intimate, connected and meaningful relationship with her husband *Jean has become aware of how important compromise is*. Compromise has helped her have more closeness with her husband resulting in "more peaceful living." She notes "And it's meaningful living too!..Because I know there's somebody there for me." *A peaceful and meaningful life* nurtures Jean's vitality. *Knowing she has someone she can always count on* is very reassuring and enhances Jean's current vital life. According to Jean she *shares good chemistry with her husband ensuring an ongoing and exciting sex life* which is important to her and boosts her present vital life. Jean continues to "appreciate the male body" which she believes strengthens sexual intimacy with her husband. She *experiences sexual intimacy as an emotional connection builder* between her and her husband and reflects "it also *keeps me active and stimulated and it keeps me a lot younger*" which increases her vitality.

Having a rich social life including enjoying supportive, caring and sharing relationships with friends is a lifelong theme and is an important way that Jean feels connected to others thereby nourishing her vital life. She reflects “I don’t know of life any different! I’ve basically been like that all my life...it actually fuels me!” Jean is very clear that she has spent a lifetime working very hard to create “really great relationships.” *She knows what matters to her and she won’t settle for less.* According to Jean, throughout her life, if she ever had a problem she would turn to friends for support rather than to her immediate family. Jean reflects on how *she has no fear of reaching out to people and touching them in a deep feeling place* and that she “*thrives on the energy*” and meaning produced when connecting on such a deep level noting “it makes me feel more alive! More vibrant.” According to Jean *all her friends tend to be living vital lives*; she has consciously “weaned out” the people who are not. *Being selective about the people she chooses to have in her life* is an important way in which Jean ensures she surrounds herself with people who are uplifting rather than those who might drain her energy.

Having a Sense of Personal Agency Through Control, Choices, Being Heard and Seen and Being a Fighter and a Rebel

Having a sense of personal agency is extremely meaningful for Jean and something she has strived for throughout her life. A significant part of Jean’s personal agency comes from *being a fighter and a rebel* which are lifelong themes that continue to fuel her vital life today *albeit in more mellowed forms.* Having what Jean refers to as a “*feisty*” character allowed her to perceive she had some control over her life as a child. According to Jean her mother tried to bring her up to be “seen and not heard,” to be “this good little girl” who would “keep quiet.” Jean refused to be a quiet and good little girl. Currently *having a lot of control over her life* is very empowering and critical for her sense of well-being and contributes a great deal to her viewing her life as vital. What Jean has learned over her lifetime is how to take control of her life in ways that make her content and feel good about herself. Until her 40’s she was extremely

“fiery” and would “shoot from the hip” but she reflects “I’ve sort of *learned over the years that you get more flies with honey than you do...with vinegar!*”

Jean reflects that being feisty gave her the impetus to “go out there and...be daring.” *Being daring and “adventurous”* are empowering lifelong themes which continue currently, albeit “tamed down” somewhat and help make Jean’s life an interesting and vital one. Jean credits her feistiness with giving her “the extra oomph to just go and be a fighter.” Continuing to be a fighter at the beginning of her eighth decade gives Jean personal *satisfaction and a sense of independence* and she passionately declares “I’ve always been very independent. Always!” *Being both a fighter and fiercely independent* is a vast source of strength from which Jean acknowledges she continues to draw inspiration and energy to live an agentic and vital life.

Jean feels empowered knowing she has choices and this is important to her well-being and fuels her present vital life. She explains the power of having even simple choices in the following way:

Like what does a vital life mean to me? To me it means that when I get up in the morning and my body has aches and pains...I have a choice. I either stay in bed or I boot my butt out of bed and get moving!

Jean “always” chooses getting out of bed rather than staying there and “vegetating” because it leads to her *having a more “productive” day* which makes her feel good about herself and contributes to her feeling she is living vitally. *Choosing to do something positive each and every day* ensures “the dark cloud leaves” which means Jean remains upbeat and experiences good emotional health.

Jean sees her choice as a child to not play a victim role and thus not become “poor me” as having been a very empowering force throughout her life. *Refusing to be a victim* is an important lifelong theme and Jean reflects “for me, living vitally means I still have the choice to

be the victim or not to be the victim.” Having choices also means that Jean can decide whether or not she is going to become emotionally “embroiled” in all the “stuff” and “chaos” that is inevitable living in a large city. As an example of emotionally taxing events for her, Jean described relatively recent gang and drug related events that have led to a number of shootings and murders. Jean reflects “the chaos out there...it was really stressing me out.” Five years ago she made the following decision: “I’m on this planet I have to make the best of it. So, I’m in it but not of it! And that really is so freeing!” *Having the choice to decide how she will live the life she values* in spite of the challenges life throws in front of her is extremely efficacious for Jean and has contributed a lot to her current vital living. Choosing to be efficacious is also tied into *perspective-taking* for Jean and by *deciding to align herself with positive ways of being rather than negative ones* means she continues to have the energy to live vitally and can even “go out dancing” when she wants to.

Having a positive and optimistic outlook on life is an important way in which Jean feels she is personally empowered and able to live vitally. *Having a positive attitude about herself and life* gives Jean “a lot more pizzazz to keep moving” and not be weighed down by negative feelings. Having a positive outlook on life is very important for Jean to maintain good physical as well as emotional health because, as she reflects, “I even walk straighter.” Being positive and *feeling optimistic* allows Jean “to be more of a free person” and to do what she likes doing. She believes that older adults who view life negatively and/or become self-absorbed with perceived worse health than they really have are doomed to live unhappy and non-vital lives.

Being seen and heard are critical ways in which Jean feels empowered and which feed her vital life. When she feels that she has been a “shining star” or a role model for others and receives acknowledgement for this, she knows that people have seen and listened to her, something that she didn’t feel happened when she was growing up. *When people hear her, Jean*

feels that she matters and that what she says is important. This gives her a lot of *hope for the future and knowledge that people are indeed capable of change*, both important factors contributing to her ability to live a vital life at age 71 years.

Lifelong Learning, Self-Examination, Reflection and Understanding

Learning and formal and informal education are lifelong significant themes and continue currently to be important to Jean's vital life. She reflects "I can't ever stop learning! I can't—to have a closed mind, to me, it's like getting back in that box and just putting the lid on..."

Inexorably tied to learning is Jean's *lifelong journey of self-examination through reflection and understanding*. Jean says that it was only later in life while she was participating in therapy that she "discovered I'm very intelligent" She reflects "I'm very quick with everything! That's why I know I've got quite a brain there." She notes "I downplayed it always." Jean graduated from high school with a grade 12 diploma and went on to study business at college. Eventually she did lab technician training via an apprenticeship and began a career as a lab technician. According to Jean she "just falls into things by osmosis." This means that she doesn't necessarily "intentionally" seek out learning but when she's ready to hear or learn something "the right teacher appears" and she's "open enough" at this stage of her life that "a lot of it seeps in..."

Being open to new challenges and/or a belief in fate are themes Jean has experienced throughout her life and ones that contribute a lot to her vitality. Jean attributes a lot of her strength for living a vital life to her *almost insatiable curiosity*. "I'm curious about a lot of things! I like to know about a lot of different things," she notes. Currently Jean and her husband have dived into learning how to use cell phones and being more up-to-date with current computer technology.

Self-reflection and understanding are crucial components of Jean's happiness, satisfaction and meaning-making all of which contribute hugely to her current vital life. Before she started on her "journey of self-examination" through therapy in the early 1980's she feels she

wasted a lot of her valuable energy feeling “angry and full of rage” and that she “burned a lot of bridges” with family members. According to Jean her first marriage was unravelling, she wasn’t talking to her mother and she wasn’t as emotionally available to her daughter as she wanted to be. She reflects “and I didn’t feel good inside!..it seemed like my insides were getting ripped apart.” *It was at this point in her life that she “started doing something different, working on herself.” With the help of therapy and taking control of her life, Jean faced being depressed and got on with living life. Her ability to cope with her feelings and life’s challenges in meaningful and emotionally healthy ways evolved.* Jean reflects that she began to explore “the person that I really am!” She was able to unload emotional baggage she had been carrying around for most of her life and begin expressing feelings she had “stifled” since childhood, which freed up a lot of positive energy. Jean no longer feels the need to control her feelings and reflects “*I can now smell the roses* whereas I didn’t even used to see them.”

Because of all the work that Jean has done on herself she reflects “my life is a pretty open book.” She adds “I have no secrets!” Jean notes that the significance of *having a life that’s an open book* is that “*I don’t have to be a phony! I can just be myself!..It’s very freeing!*” Jean says “when I can be myself, I’m not wasting energy on covering something up! I can just use it for whatever I require for vital living!” Jean credits her *belief in the spiritual world* with imbuing her with “knowledge” and “wisdom” over the past few years. Along with *gaining knowledge and wisdom*, Jean has experienced a lot of psychic intuition and messages and reflects “this is an old soul in this body.” Jean is happy to pass on her wisdom to whoever needs it and she feels very rewarded to think she “was able to pass some goodness on to somebody else.” At this point in her life she acknowledges “I would hate to have lived my life and then that’s it; nobody learned anything from me!”

Keeping Active and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests, and Creating Memories

Keeping active and involved both mentally and physically by having, developing and pursuing interests is critical to Jean's physical, mental and emotional well-being and contributes considerably to her vital lifestyle. Jean believes that vital living means "I'm still doing something." She adamantly states "I never exercised in my life, until probably about nine years ago" when she was diagnosed with 'hypertension tendencies' and an irregular heart rhythm when under physical stress. It was at that time, with the encouragement and support of her husband, that she began participating in the Healthy Heart group which meets twice weekly for exercise and socializing. Tied into participating in certain activities for Jean is *an element of planning and having a routine or regimen* on certain days of the week. While Jean is very clear that she doesn't like planning because she feels like her mother is still trying to tell her to do something, she admits that an element of planning and having certain routines contribute a lot to her present vital life.

Keeping her mind stimulated is currently very important for Jean to live an interesting and vital life. Having had a concussion years ago has made Jean cognizant that her short term memory needs a good workout every day. She does crossword puzzles to keep it alert. She has a favourite television series that she faithfully watches and recently, because of the Olympics, has begun watching hockey on television. She believes that when she *engages in different experiences and meets different people she is opening and stimulating her mind and "always broadening" her perspective on life.*

Being actively engaged doing the things she loves and at times finds challenging is an important reason Jean believes life is worth living. *She loves the challenge of figuring things out.* She reflects "I'm not a do nothing type of person. I have to keep active almost all the time." During the interview process Jean came to the conclusion that her mother has been a role model

for her active engagement in life. She notes “she was a real doer person” and “she was very active right up until the end” even though her fingers were “all gambled up” from crocheting. *Jean is extremely creative.* She cooks, knits, crochets, paints, collages, and does genealogy. Throughout her home are wonderful examples of all the different kinds of creative work that Jean engages in.

It is largely through her activities and creative endeavours that Jean *has created and continues to create lasting meaningful memories of connectedness with others past and present* which has become more important for her as she ages. Learning about her family’s history through her interest in genealogy and keeping the wonder of events such as the Olympics alive through her collage work means that Jean can continue to *experience the “connectedness with everything” including every positive experience* so critical to her vital life. Through these memories of being connected to others through activities and events Jean finds “joy and happiness” and “peace of mind” and is reminded *to be kind to others*, all important factors enabling her to continue to live a vital life.

Having a Passion in Life, Setting Goals, Giving Good Effort and Building Self-Esteem

Having a passion in life is a source of deep meaning for Jean and has been a considerable force in nurturing her vital life. Jean considers painting to be her passion and the conduit through which she has come to know herself not only as talented and creative artist but also as a competent and worthy individual. In her words:

...I kind of go with the dips and dives with my art. But when I do it I just get so absorbed! It’s just like I go at it with such gusto that nothing else matters to me...I would just pick up a thing and just paint and you know the whole world just floated right by and whatever problems there were they just dissolved. They weren’t there when I finished doing my painting.

Painting has been a major process of healing for Jean. She reflects “I also learned a lot about myself by doing art, about what a perfectionist I am!” Jean notes “I learned to let go of a lot of that stuff.” Through the process of creating art, Jean learned to *stop striving for perfection*, noting “that’s kind of how I had lived my life up till then.” Jean reflects “when I get into my art it just kind of fills me and it just gives me a sense of joy.” When she creates art she feels her vitality or life force “flow” through her.

Throughout her childhood, adolescence and adulthood Jean acknowledges having “very low self-esteem” and “a very low opinion” of herself. She thought she “wasn’t worth two cents.” *Through painting she tapped into her worthiness* and, for the first time in her life, she was able to acknowledge to herself that what she was doing was “good enough,” even “amazing.” And from that point Jean began to see herself as “good enough” and her *self-esteem bloomed*. *From self-acceptance grew a greater acceptance of others* which has greatly enhanced her ability to live vitally.

Carrying On, Accepting, Adapting, and Coping with Life’s Challenges

Carrying on, adapting, and coping with life’s challenges are lifelong themes which continue currently and which contribute a lot to Jean’s vital life past and present. Jean considers herself to be “a strong person” and to have a “strong character.” She credits her mother with “ingraining” in her from childhood to “keep on going” no matter what happens in life. “...you don’t buckle under; you keep on going,” she comments. *Perseverance* is a critical element in Jean’s vital living. Jean *takes responsibility for the quality of her life* and takes great pride and satisfaction in *viewing herself as the creator of the life she values*. She embodies the qualities of *motivation and a good work ethic*, two strengths that have helped her carry on through the difficult times in her life and continue to sustain her vital life.

According to Jean, *not ever having been a worrier* is an important reason why she has been able to carry on and live vitally throughout most of her life. She would advise middle-aged adults to “stop worrying so much” because it gets in the way of living a vital life. Jean acknowledges that adapting and changing have been a lifelong struggle for her. However by embracing aging she has come to *awareness that acceptance of what she cannot change, adaptation, and change are very necessary and important factors* for her life to continue to be a vital one. *Openness to change, including changing her mind about things*, is something new for Jean. As she has moved into the realm of older adulthood she has come to accept and understand that it is critical for her life satisfaction and ability to live life vitally to not think and live in terms of “black and white” but to encourage herself to open up to more shades of grey.

Being outspoken, straightforward and honouring her unique personhood are themes that have been important in Jean’s past and currently support her vibrant and vital lifestyle. Knowing these things about herself have allowed her to carry on with her life and deal with numerous challenges she has faced. “Well, to me, living is just to be myself and be the very best that I can,” reflects Jean. By living authentically Jean feels that she is caring and competent and this makes her feel wonderful about herself which makes living each day and facing every challenge a more inspiring and hopeful endeavour. Jean admits that *living authentically and being herself* can sometimes land her “into hot water.” However she also reflects “I can deal with my consequences.” *Being able to deal with the consequences of her actions* is a significant way in which Jean copes with life’s challenges.

Healing damaged relationships and not feeling guilty are important for Jean’s emotional well-being and contribute to her ability to carry on and live vitally as an older adult. Before her brother died Jean spent a week with him and they “mended a lot of fences.” This was very helpful in allowing her “a sense of freedom from feeling guilty for not connecting with him”

throughout their lives. According to Jean guilt saps her energy, and brings her down and feels like a heavy weight on her chest. “If I have this rock weighing me down, I can get quite nasty,” she reflects. Approximately 15 years before her mother died Jean reflects “I healed the relationship with my mom.” By *healing the wounded relationships with her brother and mother* Jean reflects she was able to free her “energy to do the things that I want for vital living” and for her this feels like “eagles soaring.”

A current challenge Jean faces is the distance between where she lives (Burnaby, BC) and where her daughter and granddaughter live (Ontario). She would like to spend a lot more time with them. However Jean talks to herself and reflects “I am the one who brought this daughter up to be very universal and very outgoing and very everything else! So this is the payoff I get...I didn’t bring her up to stay in this little box.” She adds “So I’m very pleased for her and I’m very proud of her...It’s what I call Life 101.”

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life are very significant and sustain Jean’s vitality. She is a very generative person. She “would like to see the world change” and because this is so important to her she tries to be *a positive role model to others* with regard to being more *open, optimistic, kinder and helpful*. Interwoven with these qualities is Jean’s *belief in the value of her own uniqueness and in honouring the uniqueness of all people*. She believes that by her having strived to live this way her daughter has benefitted greatly and Jean hopes that her granddaughter will also be impacted positively by the same role modelling. *Goal setting* is another important way Jean believes she is living a vital life and positively impacting the younger generations. Every goal Jean sets for herself either through physical, social activities and/or creative endeavours is *done to the very best of her ability*. She feels proud when *she gives her best effort, whether or not the results are what she expected*. She

reflects “*I want to do the very best...job that I can for as long as I’m here.*” “I would like to see peace and not war,” Jean notes. Throughout her life she has been “a warrior” for peace and justice and she is optimistic that this goal will be attained through showing people how to “live on the positive side” and “dare to be different.” Jean feels she is genuinely this person, this warrior with family, friends and acquaintances. She believes that “life’s all about...having it better than what the forefather’s had.”

A great part of *Jean’s purpose for living is that she leaves the world a better place for her offspring* and this goal contributes to her feeling invigorated, productive and vital. “I’m very much for brotherhood” she reflects. She defines brotherhood in the following way: “It’s me caring for you and you caring for somebody else and being there to help.” *Reciprocity of caring and supporting one another* is an important value for Jean and makes her life a worthwhile and vital one. *Having a grandchild gives Jean “more reason for living.”* Jean notes that being a grandmother for the first time at the age of 71 years is “a new lease on life.” *It makes her feel that her life continues to have purpose.* For Jean it gives her “extra energy” which makes her life a lot more vital. Jean will be spending time in Ontario taking care of her granddaughter as her daughter transitions back to work. *Having a grandchild has inspired Jean to look at her life and make positive changes where necessary,* for example, taking more control for living a healthier lifestyle. Being inspired “fuels” Jean. She notes “It just fuels me and gives me extra energy to keep on...doing things and be more open and do something different and try something else.” Jean also *feels her life is purposeful and worthwhile because she also inspires others.* When people are inspired by her, Jean feels “fulfilled” because she believes her “mission” for or “goal” of a better world for all is “one little step closer!”

By being with younger generations and feeling she is making a difference in their lives, Jean experiences her own life as purposeful, fulfilled and vital. In our first interview she had

expressed a longing to be more involved with younger people. Currently she is billeting adolescents who are participating in Katimavik and has her name on the list for future billeting. She will have students live with her for 10 days three times a year and is extremely excited to be doing this. Having young people around not only energizes Jean, but broadens her perspective on youth. Jean observes that *being with younger people and experiencing their energy and enthusiasm* is very uplifting. She reflects “It’s different and it’s more stimulating!...it actually gives me the extra stimulus to get moving...” She comments on how young people are role models for the type of life she wants to live—an uplifting life, “right up until her last breath.” Jean is quick to point out that there is an element of reciprocity in her relationship with her young guests. “They’re so appreciative,” she exclaims. *To feel appreciated and valued* are two significant ways Jean’s vitality is sustained.

Jean’s *connection to nature* is significant and meaningful and enhances her current vital life. She considers herself to be connected deeply to nature and believes that this connection to and love of nature provides her with energy which fuels her vital life. *She gathers “universal energy” from her connection to “the trees, the flowers, the dogs, the cats...”* She loves to garden and reflects “I’ve almost got all the seeds in now except for the May ones.”

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal responsibility for her life is very significant for Jean, contributes a lot to her ability to currently live a vital life and is something she has aspired to more and more since early middle age. She notes “I also know that I have to take responsibility for myself, you know, my lifestyle, everything.” *Being physically healthy* has been a significant theme throughout Jean’s life and she is currently very proactive about taking responsibility for her health in order to continue living vitally in her eighth decade. Jean stopped smoking and drinking coffee approximately 35 years ago, noting “I’ve had a life without them! I can get buzzed on life.” She

found a doctor nine years ago who is willing to work with her while she participates in alternatives to traditional Western medical practices. Currently she has an irregular heart rhythm if she undergoes physical stress, breathing problems associated with having been a smoker and a hyperactive thyroid for which she receives homeopathic treatment. The only medication Jean takes is for “hypertension tendencies.” She credits having an infant granddaughter with motivating her to live a healthier lifestyle. Jean reflects that having a grandchild has “inspired” her to “take more responsibility” for her health because, in her words, “...to make sure I’m around here and I can see her, you know, when she goes to elementary school and maybe even when she gets married.”

Being socially responsible is a very meaningful and important part of Jean’s life and helps make it a vital one. She spends a lot of time on the phone “supporting people.” Currently she is keeping in touch with her cousin who recently had surgery because she has lung cancer. Jean volunteers for hospice by filling in for other volunteers when they are sick or go on holidays. She notes “in May I’m going to lead the bereavement walking group three of the Wednesdays.” She also visits with people who need to be visited at the hospice, sitting with them for a couple of hours. As well she tries to attend most of the memorial services because there aren’t enough volunteers.

Having Adequate Financial Security

Jean understands that *having adequate financial security* is important and contributes to her ability to currently live a vital life. Jean very self-honestly laughingly admits to being “a kept woman” because her husband has a good retirement plan. However it is important for her to point out that accumulation of possessions and material goods is not something that is at all meaningful to her at this stage of her life. Jean comments that in her lifetime she has accrued “stuff” and she has also “been on welfare.” She reflects “if I had money I’d spend it. If I didn’t

have money, I didn't spend it...And I was just as happy!" Jean definitely thinks that financially planning for retirement is necessary in order for older adults to have an adequate quality of life as they age partially because there tend to be more physical losses connected to aging. She recalls that her cataract surgery was expensive and comments that her husband will soon need hearing aids.

Jean believes that *having the financial foundation to travel, do activities she enjoys doing, and participate in perspective broadening events is critical* for her life to be exciting and vital. Not having adequate finances "would really hamper me from doing things" Jean exclaims. "I want to have a, still, basically, a very productive life! A satisfying life!" she states and acknowledges that having enough money to do a lot of the things she loves and finds rewarding contributes greatly to her having a vital life. She knows people who are narrowing their lifestyles and living less interesting and vital lives because they don't want to spend a cent on anything in order to leave all their money for their children when they die. Jean says "that's a pile of crap! Why not enjoy it as long as you can?"

Not Taking Things for Granted, Feeling Fortunate for Life, Loss and Inevitable Changes

Not taking things for granted and feeling fortunate and blessed for her wonderful life are themes that Jean has become aware of and understood in more recent years. They are very important contributors to Jean's current vital life. She explains that for most of her life she "just took everything for granted." However in "more recent times" Jean has focused on the many good things in her life and reflects "*I feel that I'm very, very blessed* that I have created the type of life that I have and the relationships and just everything in my life."

Jean credits becoming *more involved in "spirituality" as a significant factor for no longer taking things for granted* and for understanding how important it is to her sense of living a meaningful and vital life to "say thanks for a lot of things that have happened" in her life. Jean

notes that *living her life from a perspective of feeling gratitude* has shown her that “there isn’t anything that doesn’t happen if I really focus on it.” She finds it “amazing” how she has come to realize at age 71 years that whatever she wants in her life is “always provided” when she “asks the universe” for it. Jean feels very blessed to have *a philosophy of life in which she feels connected to “the whole universe.”* She states “And I’m grateful for that. I don’t have to struggle and strive to get things like I used to have to or at least I thought that’s what I had to do.” She notes “My life is very easy. *Life is very easy. I have no fears.*” Jean reflects “I come from a long line of alcoholics...And I certainly have all the qualities [chuckling] for being an alcoholic.” Jean did enjoy consuming alcohol when she was younger but developed an allergy to it and “gave it up.” She notes “So I feel I’m very blessed that somebody was looking after me!”

Physical losses are an inevitable part of Jean’s life as she ages and she accepts this reality but refuses to allow it to keep her from enjoying her life and living vitally. “I’ve noticed...probably about 65 [years of age] that *my energy level is not the same as it used to be.* So it takes a lot more convincing to motivate [chuckling] me to do things” notes Jean. Aches and pains are definitely a part of Jean’s day-to-day life and she accepts that they are here to stay. However she doesn’t allow them to keep her from enjoying what she loves to do. Jean always enjoyed dancing but at this time in her life, with a heart that becomes more irregular under physical stress, she can’t exert herself as much as before. She *compensates for what she can no longer do physically by doing things she enjoys that require less physical exertion.* “I don’t have to be out there dancing and carrying on all the time because sometimes my body prevents it at this point” she says.

While Jean is aware of her own mortality and is no stranger to death, having dealt personally with her father’s death when he was in his mid-50s, her brother’s death when he was in his mid-50’s, her mother’s death and the deaths of relatives, she comments “I have no

problems with death at all.” *She accepts that death is a part of life and that worse than death would be to live unengaged, uninspired and uninvolved.* “I can’t think of anything worse than going into a care home” Jean exclaims. Ideally she hopes that she will be able to live her life “to the fullest” and then die quickly from her heart stopping. Overall Jean notes “I’m just very grateful that I am where I am and I don’t want to trade places with anybody or anything!”

Having Fun, Being Spontaneous and Enjoying Life Represented Through Metaphor and Tangible Representation

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

The metaphor that Jean envisioned as representing a vital life at age 71 years was “a whole bunch of people dancing around, like a circle” which is symbolic for her of the following:

...the connection with the people. It’s having fun! And just being active and alive!

Being alive...I don’t mean existing!”

Having fun while connecting with others, being active, not worrying and being spontaneous are some important ways in which Jean feels she is intensely alive, vibrant and vital. *Having fun and enjoying life* are themes that have been most present for Jean after the age of 40 years and contribute hugely to her current vital life. *Having a wonderful sense of humour* which was evident during both interviews is a part of Jean’s authenticity and is a significant way for her to carry on and live a joyful and vital life. Jean takes great pride in *her lifelong theme of being spontaneous* and perceives her *ability to live spontaneously in the moment* to be of paramount importance to her continued vital living. Her *continued journey of self-examination and growth* which took flight in her early 40s has given Jean’s life “a whole different meaning.” *She has learned to live fully in the moment, express her feelings freely and let go of what she has no control over.* This is a liberating and thus vital way for her to live. Her advice for people in their 40’s and 50’s would be to seek therapy if they need it and “*get off their ass and just live life*” if they intend to be living vital lives when they are in their 70’s and 80’s.

She describes herself as always having been and continuing to be “a fly by the seat of her pants type of person.” Jean views *being spontaneous throughout her life* as helping her to experience so many more things than she would have otherwise done. Advice Jean would give members of the younger generations in order to live a vital life in their 70’s and 80’s would be to be spontaneous in the moment more often and *to enjoy themselves and not take life too seriously*. Jean fervently believes that “life will work out in the end anyway.”

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

Jean *participates in the Red Hat Society* which is an organization for women over 50 years of age to provide connection with other women and, in her particular group’s case, to have fun. Jean chose as her tangible representation for currently living a vital life a picture of her dressed up in her Red Hat Society outfit complete with red hat, boa, gloves, and sparkly purple dress. According to Jean the outfit signifies *having fun and being “really silly” which is another way Jean lives life in the moment*. No matter how much pain she experiences from a sore hip or how much she feels like staying in bed, getting dressed up and participating in Red Hat Society activities encourages her to forget about her aches and pains and to “end up having a great day!” Jean likens her dressing up for Red Hat events to being like a “little girl” and playing dress up. When she dresses up she reflects “It’s just different. I mean I just get a really different feeling in my gut. Just kind of fun. Free! That’s it! Free! Freedom!” Jean observes other adults in their seventies and eighties who “forget to be in the moment” and thus cannot *savour and enjoy the feeling of freedom and fun living in the moment imparts*. She believes their lives lack vitality because they have forgotten how to have fun in the here and now.

Art: Doggedly Living Life as a Maverick and Reaping the Rewards

Art is an 81 year old retired accountant, academic and business consultant, husband of M. for 60 years, current partner of A. for approximately three to four years, and father of a son and

daughter, both in their 50's. Art's narration of his experiences of being vitally engaged in living as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in his current life, as well as new themes that have more recently evolved in his 70's and 80's. His first comment after he was asked the questions: **"How are you living a vital life?"** and **"What does living a vital life mean to you?"** was "I...wasn't really into the word or the phrase "vital life." But, without hesitation, he enthusiastically begins his story of living vitally.

Financial Security and Freedom

Art refers to himself as a "depression baby," who grew up in a working class family, the elder of two sons, in the east end of Vancouver. As a result of being a child during the depression, a *lifelong theme of the importance of ensuring freedom from financial woes* was forged early on in Art's life. As an adolescent, Art understood that *hard work, "putting up with" things, education, tenacity, and perseverance* were the stepping stones to a financially satisfying life, which in turn was important to him for well-being and living a vital life.

Tied closely to the theme of ensuring financial freedom, *a strong work ethic* is an important thematic thread that continues to run through Art's current life. The ability to work hard was shaped in Art's adolescence and became the means by which he eventually realized financial freedom. "Starting at age 15 until I graduated from UBC at age 22, I had a series of mind-boggling, miserable, boring, boring jobs" notes Art. As a youth, he learned to "put up with" difficult and boring jobs and to work hard in order to have a more financially secure and fulfilling life, in his case through obtaining a university education. Two years before he graduated from university, he married his wife, whom he had known before their high school years. Art reflected on this being "pretty outlandish in those days" because in the late 1940's it was incumbent upon men to have their careers established before marrying.

Being personally and financially responsible is also a theme that has played itself out throughout Art's life. It is a key factor that Art realizes contributes to his ability to remain vital and it is closely connected to achieving financial security for him. Throughout his educational odyssey, great effort and struggle were involved in raising a family and having a happy marriage without adequate financial resources. He never shirked taking responsibility then, nor now. Financial struggles, including, "being quite poor and sort of living from pay cheque to pay cheque and not being able to meet bills" were the only cause of marital unhappiness that he remembers. Art notes, "it just meant I had to work harder to fix it," *a theme of tenacity, will, and self-responsibility that has resonated throughout his life.*

When he was 45 years old, not long after moving back from Eastern Canada, Art had secured the financial means to realize his goal of moving to West Vancouver, where he was able to take advantage of the many opportunities available to sustain the vital life he desired, and considered critical for his well-being as he aged. After his retirement, he was able to "travel" and "cruise" with his wife as well as participate in fitness activities which he considered expensive and "a real extravagance." Having adequate finances continued to play a crucial role in supporting Art's perception of living a vital life when, approximately 10 years ago, his wife had a TIA (transient ischemic attack) or mini stroke, resulting in dementia and her eventual placement in long term care. Being financially solid at this stage of his life is a huge weight off Art's shoulders because he can afford to have his wife in the care facility that is best suited to her needs. As well, being able to financially ensure his wife's continued care if he were to die before her, is critically important to Art and allows him to live more vitally in the present. Because Art planned for being financially solvent after his retirement, he can now "do the things he wants" including travelling, participating in both indoor and outdoor recreational activities, playing

music, and skiing. He acknowledges, “If I was poor, I wouldn’t be able to do that, would I?” Being comfortable financially is “easier,” and according to Art, is important to his happiness.

Lifelong Learning and Education

Art’s odyssey of *lifelong learning and education* has, and continues to have, significance for his feeling fulfilled and vital. This odyssey clearly showcases his *tendency to be a maverick* as is evident as he reflects on having “three different careers” throughout his life. After graduating from UBC with a degree in commerce, Art worked in accounting for a few years. Then, on the advice of a relative or friend, he worked nights and weekends at home for three years to secure his accountancy designation (CGA). During that time he attended UBC for one night per week for lectures. At age forty, Art began a doctoral program at a university in Washington State, USA and, upon receiving his Ph. D., he and his family moved to Eastern Canada where he began his second career, as an academic. After one and a half years, he moved back to BC and taught accounting at a university in the Lower Mainland for approximately seven years, during which time he became a tenured associate professor. Approximately eight years after becoming an academic, Art realized he didn’t want to remain an academic until he retired. So at age 50, he left the security of a tenured position to begin his third career as a self-employed business consultant. He continued as a consultant until his official retirement at age 60. Art acknowledges that having three distinct careers was atypical of the men of his generation and indicative of his uniqueness as a bit of a maverick—a designation that suits Art based on *his unorthodoxy, eagerness to try new things, and independent-mindedness*—all qualities Art views himself as having and that continue to play out in his life and feed his vitality.

After retiring at 60 years of age, Art began *volunteering in an effort to give back to his society and his community*. He became a member of both the Canadian and the International Accounting Standards Boards, volunteering his time and expertise, for a very meagre stipend. He

fulfilled these roles until 70 years of age, at which point he decided he wanted to do other things. Currently Art volunteers his time and derives a great deal of enjoyment as a member of a band that plays concerts in senior's facilities.

Having and Pursuing Interests

Art believes that *being keenly interested in something you enjoy doing and proactive throughout life* are crucial for well-being and vital living. He stresses the importance of choosing to participate in activities that you are avidly interested in when you are younger, thereby keeping mentally fit and active, as boding well for older adulthood and vital living. Art advises people in their fifties and sixties to guard their health and practice preventative medicine, something he started “pretty late in life,” suggesting not “waiting for something to break” and then “get it fixed.” Trying new things and working away at them, little by little, as well as having something interesting to do upon retirement, are essential requirements that Art believes are necessary for preparing for a fulfilling and vital old age. Not keeping fit mentally or physically and not looking for new things to do are pivotal differences Art sees in older adults who are not living vital lives and himself. When reflecting on older adults who are not financially secure and not living as fulfilled or as vitally as he is, Art notes that they are in a “goddamned financial mess!” and “it just scares me to think what’s going to become of them!” Art notes that the people he knows who are living vital and fulfilling lives *have all had tragedies*, but “seem to be bouncing along pretty good” because *they are keeping “busy and involved,”* themes that have played out throughout his life. Finally, Art believes that people who find themselves in unhappy or untenable situations should be proactive and “either...fix it or get out! Get on with life!”

Staying Fit, Active, and Healthy

While having a good financial foundation is extremely important in ensuring a vital life for Art, he believes *having good health and taking responsibility for his health* is the most

important contributor to his well-being and vitality. Maintaining good health has been a constant theme throughout his life and, upon reflecting on the meaning of good health Art notes “if you don’t have your health, you don’t have anything!” Art firmly believes that having health issues would severely compromise his ability to live a vital life. Hand-in-hand with good health, as essential for vital living, go *exercise physical fitness, and self-discipline*, themes that have played out throughout Art’s life. Consequently, staying fit and active continue to be high priorities in Art’s life. Art considers “mind-bending” and physically “hard” jobs like “shovelling coal” and “digging ditches” that he did as an adolescent, as critical for planting the seeds for his lifelong physical activity. Persevering through such hard and boring work, taught Art *self-discipline*, a quality that is important in order for him to live vitally. For Art, regular physical fitness is a “penchant going way back when I was in my 30’s. This was before everybody talked about aerobics and fitness and all that stuff.” Long before it was the popular or ‘in’ thing to do Art and his wife were regularly participating in fitness. Art likens his propensity for keeping active and fit as more of a “personal habit pattern” developed over many years, rather than a “team effort.” Art reflects that going to graduate school supported and broadened his penchant for fitness, because he was with peers who also participated in fitness and because he was able to extend his repertoire of fitness activities by using the university’s gym and pool. It was at this time that he began to run “almost on a daily basis,” something he continued to do until approximately three years ago.

Currently Art downhill skis, albeit less often than even a few years ago, something he has done since he was 13 years old. He also hikes and walks and recently, with the encouragement of his current partner, he has taken up playing tennis. He derives a great deal of enjoyment and zest for life from *living actively engaged in the moment* and reflects “when I feel good, it contributes to my sense of well-being.” He recalls walking down a street and saying, “God, I feel good” and

then jumping off a curb. He believes that being “sedentary” would curb his vital life considerably because he wouldn’t have the ability to do what he wants to do, when he wants too, thus, sapping his well-being.

In his late 70’s and early 80’s, Art has felt a greater need to practice *self-care* as he experiences, and knows he will likely continue to experience, even more, the physical limitations associated with aging. Art has recognized that in order to continue to live vitally, it is necessary for him to adapt his fitness activities to accommodate the realities and limitations of the aging process. After a hiatus of a few years, Art has recently taken up running again, although with modifications. In his words:

I run-walk, run-walk, run-walk. And right now I’m doing more walking than running. But if I get back to where I was four years ago and I may or I may not, I would run the whole 3 K. in about 30 minutes. Now run-walking-running will take about 40 minutes. So that’s my new thing I’m buggering around with now!

In order to sustain his continued physical activity currently and in the future, Art is cognizant that he now has to “baby” himself, and this is a new factor in his life. He has no intention of overdoing something that is “hurting” him. His joints are still good, but if he finds he can’t run or that running starts to bother him, he acknowledges that he “wouldn’t do it.”

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Having a satisfying social life is also an important theme in Art’s story of vital living. Art recognizes that physical activities must be balanced with social engagement in order for him to feel fulfilled and enjoy a vital lifestyle. “I have a lot of friends” he comments. He tells a story of both long-lasting, enduring friendships, and the forging of newer friendships, and his efforts to keep in contact and nurture both. He meets twice yearly with a group of friends who he has known for approximately 65 years since his undergraduate years at UBC. He also still keeps in

touch with co-workers from his previous academic institutions, as well as a friend from his old Burnaby neighbourhood.

For Art it is not just about having social relationships, but *feeling comfortable within these relationships*, that contributes to his sense of well-being and vitality. According to Art, family and friends are “kind of like old shoes, I guess, to me—comfortable!” Maintaining contact with old friends is important for Art because he knows “that there’s always somebody he can pick up and phone and talk to! When I’ve known somebody for a long time, we’ve always got something to talk about.” Art explained that family and friends “know” him and that he “knows” them, resulting in “no surprises” and “no stress,” critical factors in ensuring his well-being. Feeling comfortable is also connected to Art’s *easy going disposition and disdain for interpersonal conflict*. Art acknowledges that he doesn’t like conflict and that at this juncture in his life he will “avoid” people or situations if there is conflict. “One thing about being old is not to be bosom buddies with everybody I bump into...Hell, life’s too short!” he reflects.

While maintaining old friendships is important, making new friends also contributes to Art’s vital life. More and more, he is aware that having a vital social life as he ages involves *being engaged in activities in his community and meeting new people*. His newer group of friends, going back three years, are involved with music and “it’s kind of nice,” Art notes. He is keenly aware that “if I develop new interests and I meet new people, I guess it keeps life interesting and therefore, is vital.” Making new friends supports Art’s desire to continue to develop new interests which he feels contributes to a well-lived and vital life.

Just as having good friends ensures that Art’s life is more vital, *having a close, caring and supportive relationship with his children*, also contributes to a vital life for Art. Art acknowledges that having family—in this case his two children—and their support, contributes significantly to his ability to live vitally, and has been “one of the big helps to me.” He views the

relationship he has with his children as “simpatico” but makes it clear that they are not generally dependent on one another.

It’s not as if my kids and I are on each other’s doorstep. They’re busy leading busy lives...I may go a week or more without talking to either one of them.”

He is especially grateful for the support they have shown throughout his wife’s long illness.

After his wife’s illness and move to a care facility Art moved on with his personal life. *Having love and companionship* are important for his well-being and contribute greatly to his current vital life. Art credits *his current relationship* as contributing significantly to his ability to live a fulfilled and vital life. Approximately three or four years ago, Art met a woman with whom he shares a love of nature, physical activity, and a positive attitude, and they began a romantic relationship, eventually moving in together. While he is adamant that he was coping and managing before he met his current partner, noting “I wasn’t a basket case before I met her,” he refers to his new partner as “the most important thing in my life,” and to their relationship, as his greatest passion. He considers their getting together as “serendipity” given that neither of them were looking for or expecting a new romance. According to Art, their relationship is very satisfying but “not all-consuming” because while they share much in common, they also have differing interests. What has surprised Art is the chemistry between himself and his partner.

I think we’re both surprised at, if you like, the romantic aspect...I wasn’t looking for a woman to cuddle with, but as it turns out, that’s been something I never expected.

For Art, *having a loving and companionable relationship* is critical to his sense of well-being. In reflecting on his relationship with A. he haltingly noted that “the worst thing that could happen to me now, I guess, is if we were to have a fight or break-up or something like that.” Art also spoke about his gratitude to his children for their acknowledgment of his need for love and

companionship, and for their positive attitude toward his new relationship with A. According to Art he “was very moved” by their willingness to accept his new relationship, despite the fact that their mother is still alive.

Carrying on and Coping with Life’s Challenges

Another theme that has played out in Art’s life and continues to play out is *his ability to “carry on” in the face of life’s challenges*. While Art has worked hard throughout his life to have a loving marriage, to make and maintain close friendships, and to have supportive relationships with his children, for the past 10 years he regrets he has not been able to have the close and supportive relationship with his wife that they thought would continue indefinitely. Art describes how he “essentially lost his wife” following a mini stroke which caused some brain damage, eventually resulting in progressively debilitating dementia. In the wake of his wife’s illness, in his early 70’s, Art found himself faced with a life challenge that hard work, perseverance, and love could not fix. He was unprepared for the scope of his loss and the toll taken on him physically, mentally, and emotionally as a result of this “tragedy.” Art recalled this as a pivotal time for him as his life, as he had known it, was uprooted and his plans for a rich and full future life with his wife were irrevocably changed forever. Art recalled being “in bad shape” because the process of his experience of losing his wife to dementia was “a very tragic, miserable thing and in some respects worse than the person dying suddenly!” He was helpless to change the course of her illness as he witnessed her becoming “worse than a child,” no longer learning, without awareness or will. However, true to his nature and as he has always done throughout his life, Art persevered. In his words: “*I always carry on.*”

For Art, ‘carrying on’ goes hand-in-hand with coping. *Coping is a theme* that has played out throughout his life. Art describes his journey as a witness to his wife’s worsening dementia as a process of “denial,” “*coping*,” “*understanding*,” “*acceptance*,” “*decision making*,” and

“reinvention” of his life. Reflecting back on approximately 10 years of life with a spouse with dementia, Art notes that the two things that “saved my bacon” and kept me going, were that her illness was “gradual” and I *“had to cope because I was the caregiver.”* Another factor that plays a role in Art’s ability to cope with such loss is his *sense of humour* which is evident when he laughingly states, “I can’t afford to die! Goddamned tax department won’t let me” and “I have to keep a sense of humour about those things or I would go crazy.” Art is able to find humour in the darkest places and he is able to laugh at himself.

Over the course of his wife’s progressive dementia, Art *reached out for help* by enlisting home help, having his children take turns helping him care for their mother, attending a caregiver’s conference, and joining a caregiver’s support group where, in his words, “they share war stories” and where he saw that he was not alone. According to Art, through this support group he “learned to cope and then how to understand.” Though Art was determined never to put his wife in an “institution” he found himself “getting really stressed and shaky a bit” and “forgetful.” Having gone through the “agonizing” process of watching his wife “lose herself” as well as the painful process of losing his wife as he knew her, Art said he could “see why sometimes, when somebody’s ill like that, the caregiver dies, not the ill person.” After years of being his wife’s primary caregiver he realized that he “couldn’t cope anymore!” Part of understanding the coping process, for Art, was eventually learning that when the way in which he was coping was no longer working for him, he would have to make what for him were some very emotionally painful changes.

Decision-making, especially shared decision-making, was critical at this point in Art’s life. “I made decisions, and they were not easy decisions,” he states. He relied partly on the support of his children at this time, remarking that he “did a lot of agonizing” about no longer being able to care for his wife in their home. He found himself leaning on his children,

emotionally, to help make this less difficult. After Art and his children spent “quite a bit of time and energy deciding where we were going to put her” he decided to transfer his wife to a long term care facility. While the decision was difficult, according to Art it “seems to have worked out very well.”

In order to continue to be vital, in the face of his wife’s continuing struggle with dementia, Art has responded by *reinventing his life* to a large degree. This includes having to “*react to circumstances*.” For Art, this has been a journey of coming to terms with “*letting go*” and “*accepting*” that the plans you make, long term, may be derailed by illness or loss of physical strength, or other circumstances connected to aging. He has come to realize that he does not have control over certain things, including what he considers is his wife’s loss of “self” and “dignity.” The living will Art and his wife wrote stating how they wished to be treated if they became incapacitated was unable to be honoured because Art’s wife’s illness is progressive and she “gradually” lost her “decision making powers.” Art asks, “What’s the caregiver supposed to do” in that case? He poignantly reflects on the fact that he “had no thoughts of putting a pillow over” his wife’s head, so even though, according to Art, his wife would not have wanted to live without dignity, and even though his wife and he believed they had planned for that eventuality, the opposite has happened. This has been very difficult for Art to accept.

Once Art stopped denying the inevitability of the course of his wife’s dementia, he was able to realize that while *planning* is important to living a vital life, *the ability to respond and react when his plans go awry* is also pivotal. Art learned that *being open to change*, even when he was resolute that certain things wouldn’t change (e.g., putting his wife into long term care), is essential for vitality and well-being. He noted how when he was alone, he was “not despondent, even though I had a lot of sad things to think about. I was so busy coping that I didn’t have time to be despondent” because “I had to cope and I had to get on” with life.

Being Open to, and Embracing New Experiences

As long as Art is *learning and doing new things* or *being open to new experiences*, themes that have played out throughout his life, he believes his life will be interesting, have meaning, and be vital. With his wife in long term care, at age 77, Art developed new interests, one of these being music. He learned to play the ukulele which has now become a passion for him. This was uncharted territory for him, having never studied music or played a musical instrument. According to Art, it takes “doggedness” and “interest” to take up music and not only that, when you start at 77 and you’re essentially tone deaf, you have a hell of a time!” In later adulthood, Art’s learning has taken a new direction in that he is trying new things he is not good at, but that he enjoys doing. Art views “successful older age,” vital older age, as reliant on “*taking on things I’m no good at.*” He has learned the importance of “working and working away” at new activities like cards, tennis and music making “and getting better, bit by bit, haltingly.” Even though he has accepted that he will never master card playing or tennis or music, Art refuses to “quit.” He understands that in order for him to retain mental acuity *it is important to not always take the easiest route*, a theme that he has recognized in the past few years as significant to a vital life. “I have to work at something and not give up on it even if I’m no damn good at it...and there is no real prospect of ever getting good at.” In Art’s words:

If you want to keep your mind active, it isn’t good to keep doing things that you’ve been doing for years and years and years that you’re really good at. Because that doesn’t open any new circuits.

Currently, Art is considering exploring the internet, which would also entail new learning for him.

Art views “*cockiness*” as a prerequisite for vital living. Art plays ukulele in a senior’s band and is the band clerk and master of ceremonies when the band performs in senior’s homes.

He is well-suited to the “job” of master of ceremonies because he possesses a characteristic he refers to as “cockiness” and then, upon reflection, calls being “*self-satisfied*” or having “*self-confidence*.” He makes it clear that his brand of cockiness is definitely not self-importance or arrogance, but more of an attitude of “just going for something and doing it.” He describes feeling mentally stimulated and physically energized taking on things that other people wouldn’t or couldn’t do.

Not Taking Things for Granted and Accepting Inevitable Changes

While Art is keenly engaged enjoying what he does, growing as a person and learning new skills, *he also doesn’t take things for granted*. As much as Art is self-confident, he is also remarkably humble and modest about his accomplishments and abilities. He is aware and understands that there is always the possibility that “someday, somebody’s going to bring me down to size (laughing)” and he wonders, “maybe God is going to get me for this!” (chuckling)

Being self-confident also ties into his sense of being “*outlandish*,” or a *maverick*, themes that continue to play out in Art’s life and contribute to his vitality. At 78 years of age, he decided to participate in a *parcour* (“free running”) program through his Recreation Centre. He explains that free runners are the “guys you see on tv that run up walls and run along rails and jump off buildings.” Art’s intentions in participating in the program were two-fold—to prove to himself that he could do the program and to see if the program could be modified for seniors to help them with balance, flexibility, and muscle-building. He tells a remarkable story of being the oldest person in attendance by approximately 50 years and being surprised that most of the participants were “kids.” By completing the course and coming “through the course with flying colors,” Art proved to himself that he was still capable of challenging himself physically and succeeding with the challenge.

In older adulthood, Art has *realized and accepted that there are limitations involved with aging*. Although Art completed the parcour course, he was “surprised” at *the lessening of his physical strength*. He recalls:

I couldn’t keep up, but I could do all the things, in a manner of speaking. And I didn’t get hurt—I only broke two toes, which is really good (chuckle) cause they do it barefoot.

All the physical things Art used to do not so many years before, such as climbing a rope, push-ups, jumping, and fitness circuit running, were now only possible with modifications. He reflects on coming to terms with his diminishing physical strength and how “subtly I lost that strength.” Art was “humbled” by his parcour experience and reflects that he “really got his comeuppance.” Although initially Art was disappointed because he “thought he could have done” the parcour course without significant modifications, he quickly came to realize that recognizing and accepting his limitations “probably makes him smarter” about doing things that he is no longer physically capable of doing. In the four years since Art’s parcour experience, he now understands that being aware of his limitations has affected his well-being in a positive way.

I have to realize that when I’m 80, I’m not 20. My expectations have been scaled down. I don’t get too discouraged. I guess I have it in my mind that I’m not going to excel.

Not feeling discouraged because he cannot excel at everything he tries is one of the advantages that Art sees to growing older. “I probably didn’t play tennis when I was younger cause I was no damned good at it! And I got discouraged” he notes. Currently, Art delights in playing all the tennis he wants without putting pressure on himself to excel. He reflects on how “one of the nice things about being old” is that “there’s certainly a compensation,” meaning he doesn’t have to worry as much because *he doesn’t have to “prove anything to myself or anybody else.”*

Acknowledging that illness is a possibility and death is inevitable, but not dwelling on his own mortality, contributes to Art's ability to live vitally. "Otherwise" Art reflects, "I would, you know, pull a pillow over my head and quit!" *Loss through physical and/or mental decline, illness and death is more and more a "sad" fact of life* for Art currently, than when he was younger. As well as acknowledging his own physical limitations as he ages, he is also witnessing the diminishment of physical capabilities in others, the illness and death of friends and friend's spouses, and the very 'hard' and painful journey of 'losing' his wife through her struggle with dementia. Art acknowledges that he expects "the ever increasing likelihood of succumbing to disease or death at his age. "And maybe, because I'm a little bit cocky, I think, "well they're going to die but I'm not! (chuckling)"

Having A Sense of Personal Agency

Having a sense of personal agency is a lifelong theme and continues to be critical currently for Art's life to be meaningful and vital. Art also considers *having and making choices* as being essential for a vital life. He doesn't just fall into the things that he does, he chooses to do them because they interest him and challenge him. *Being independent, in control and being able to make choices about how he lives his life and where he invests his energy* has always been exceedingly important for Art. He reflects "I guess that's key probably to a lot of things about well-being—making choices that are sensible to me. Cause the opposite is being led around by the nose by somebody else." "Free choice is what I'm all about," says Art. He has come to understand that having choices is connected to seeing things through. Throughout Art's life, free choice has often been tied to putting up with things, good and bad, and seeing them through to the end—taking responsibility for the choices he makes. In his words, "I want to finish. I want to accomplish what I started to do, so I'm going to have to put up with that! I mean there's a lot of that in life!"

Having something to look forward to, figuring things out, and challenging himself in the process, is meaningful and empowering for Art and contributes to a fulfilling and vital life for him. There is a quality of tenacity, fearlessness, exuberance and joy to Art's ability to live vitally. This is evident when he reflects on his job as master of ceremonies when he and his band are playing a concert. He tells himself, "Do it, yeah, the hell with it! Just go and do it." As Art reinvents his life, he finds himself becoming more and more selective in order to live a life he feels he has more control over, is less stressful and more vital. *Selectivity* is a theme that *has occurred throughout Art's life*, but now he says, "being more selective ensures I'm not spending a lot of time doing things I don't want to do." "I can't do everything I used to do in exactly the same way...*I have to budget my energy*" in order have both physical and mental well-being. He is aware of the necessity of reserving his energy for what he really is interested in doing and what's meaningful for him. He refers to this process of selectivity as being "jealous" for himself and notes "I have to be jealous for myself in order to strike a balance between my private life and my sociable life." Art comments on the importance of being selective because it keeps him "from getting" himself "into situations" where he doesn't want to be and "being stuck there...which would certainly mitigate against living vitally!"

Connected to his 'just do it' attitude is his *ability to be "dogged,"* the personality or character trait that has been empowering throughout Art's life and which he considers has contributed the most to his vital life. "Well, I wouldn't exercise for years if I wasn't dogged! I wouldn't study for years if I wasn't dogged," he reflects. Art values his perseverance and tenacity. "I've got to keep working at something, I can do it" he notes and, upon reflection, he realizes that "doing my best is part of being dogged" and "not giving up on something, and seeing things through to the end is part of being dogged" and they all fuel his vitality.

Being Grateful for Life's Gifts and the Gift of Life

Feelings of gratitude for the many good things in his life also contribute to Art's sense of well-being and vitality. He believes that good things "seem to happen to me" and considers himself "the luckiest guy in the world" to have had his first wife and "then to have found A." He feels fortunate to have had good health and physical strength throughout his life and, more and more, Art feels grateful for the natural and man-made worlds that are basically at his doorstep. Both worlds are profoundly meaningful for Art and have contributed greatly to his vital life.

Art's appreciation for his life, past and present, has deepened as he recognizes and is beginning to accept the fact that he might not have the physical vitality to continue to enjoy mountain hiking and the outdoor places that have been such an important part of his life and so central to his living a vital life. He feels lucky to have led a very physical life in the past and to still be able to be engaged in meaningful physical and musical activities that he is capable of and enjoys doing. "The worst thing for me would probably be if I was physically unable to do the music or to play tennis or to walk the walk." For Art, living vitally means that, "I'll keep doing what I want to do as long as I can" with the acknowledgement that, "maybe there'll be some point where I can't anymore."

Art derives his strength for living vitally from "*the sum total of all my experiences and maybe it's a bit of selfishness too.*" He describes selfishness as, being "involved in myself first and the other stuff has to fit that mould." Life experience, especially his wife's struggle with dementia, has taught Art that "if I don't look after myself, nobody else is going to!" Art's good 'selfishness' or "exclusivity" ties into a vital life for him because it means "I consciously or subconsciously pick activities or things that I am engaged in cause that's what works for me."

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

“Live your life like a dog!” is the metaphor Art feels encapsulates what it takes to live vitally as an older adult.

Gee, a dog has a perfect life in many ways. Assuming I had a good master! I’d be fed and taken care of. I’d only do what I want to do! I’d enjoy everything I do!...

Enjoying life and going with the flow a little bit. If something goes wrong, I’d do something about it, like, “ki-yi-yi” or “get the Hell out of there.

Through metaphor Art describes the importance of vital living as not only *living life in the moment but also revelling in that moment*. His easy going disposition along with his ‘doggedness’ and exuberance ensure he does what he loves. Art understands that he is “reaping the rewards now of his whole life” and that one advantage of older adulthood is that, “there is a lot less of putting up with things than in the old days.” Like a dog, Art is not “necessarily passionate or overcome with one thing.” At this stage of his life, more so than when he was younger, he is living a more balanced and relaxed life and deriving pleasure from simple things such as getting up early in the morning and reading the paper and “drinking coffee and having some chocolate with it.” At 81 years of age, Art loves his life and knows when to “howl” at life’s challenges, when to fix what needs fixing, or when to walk away.

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

When asked for symbols that reflect vital living for him, Art chose three photographs—a big rhododendron bush near his home, the Hollyburn fir, and the Brohm Lake area with the Tantalus range in the background. Commenting on the importance and meaning of these photographs, Art says he realizes he has taken “for granted” both the natural (nature, including mountains and lakes) and the manmade worlds that have been an important part of his life. More

recently, and “fairly often,” he has begun to feel grateful for *having memories of being vitally engaged within both worlds*.

Art’s *love of and respect for nature* has contributed significantly to his well-being and ability to live vitally over his lifetime. However, he is realizing that he may no longer be able to physically participate in the natural world to the extent he once did. As he looks at the photographs, he comments that he is:

starting to recognize that this might be—either of the mountain ones might be too far to hike, for me, right now...but it doesn’t matter because I’ve been there, done that and, I still have the pictures and the memories. And so, it’s not as though it would be the end of the world, as a matter as living vitally...if we couldn’t go there anymore. Because I’m...keeping busy and happy with the music and what I normally do here. And the family, and so forth.

John: A Consummate Family Man Who Can Be Counted On and Who Enjoys Life Fully

John is an 82 year old former regional manager for a company that made business forms, husband for 48 years (his wife died approximately 15 years ago), common-law partner for 10 years, father of four daughters (his eldest daughter died approximately 14 years ago) ranging in age from 53 to 58 years old, and grandfather of six. John’s narration of his experiences of living vitally as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in his current life as well as newer themes that have evolved in his 70’s and 80’s. After being asked the questions: “**How are you living a vital life?**” and “**What does living a vital life mean to you?**” John, without hesitation, began to talk about his family. The crucial importance of family in John’s life is threaded through almost every major theme in his narrative.

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships and Sharing with Others

Having satisfying relationships and being able to share his life with others are lifelong themes that are critical for John's well-being and major contributors to his ability to live a vital life at age 82 years. "Family has always been first and foremost in my life" he notes. *Having close, loving, caring, and sharing relationships with his family* are essential for John's life to be satisfactory and meaningful which are key for him to feel that his life is vital. John reflects "living a vital life for me is family."

To a large extent John's profound connection to and belief in family and its power to drive and sustain his vital living were forged in his infancy and childhood. John was born in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1927 and notes that both his parents came from "important families." In the small community of St. John's, both his maternal and paternal families had a lot of stature in the community. John was the eldest of two children. His younger sister died in 1994. When John was one year old his 28 year-old father drowned trying to save another person from drowning. His father's brother subsequently married John's mother. When John was six years old, his mother died of a disease she could have been saved from if there had been sulpha drugs available at the time. Such profound loss in infancy and childhood had a major impact and influence on John's life and profoundly influenced how he determined to live his life. After his mother's death, John's paternal grandparents raised him and his sister. His aunt also played an important and positive role in John's childhood and adolescence.

Having had a strong, loving and compatible marriage for 48 years was, and continues to be a major contributor to John's vital life. John married his wife when he was 20 years old and he notes they "had children fairly early." *Being able to raise their daughters, follow their dreams and support each others' careers (John's wife was a professional actress)* brought John a lot of satisfaction which fuelled his vital life. John's wife, "a very special woman," died in 1995 at the

age of 67 years. She was first diagnosed with stomach cancer in 1985 and had surgery which was successful. However, in 1993 she was diagnosed with lung cancer and had surgery to remove a large part of one lung. John reflects on how his wife “kept going” and acted in stage plays throughout a decade of significant health problems. *Having a close, loving, supportive and meaningful relationship with his daughters and his grandchildren* has been and continues to be very important to John and a deep source of vitality in life. Prior to their mother’s death at their daughters’ urging, John and his wife moved from the Maritimes to British Columbia where all four children were living. John visits and hikes with his daughters, meets them for brunch most weekends, spends special occasions with them, and holidays yearly with them in Palm Springs. John also derives a great deal of satisfaction from the connection he shares with his grandchildren and the quality of time that they spend together.

Currently *having a caring and compatible common law relationship* is another source from which John draws a great deal of vitality. Following the loss of his wife, John realized that he “needed someone to share things with!” Currently John’s *need for sharing with someone* is largely met through his relationship with K., his partner of 10 years. He reflects “this is a huge boon for me to have a partner.” Even though his partner is 15 years younger than John, he reflects “we’re very much in tune...we spark each other off.” He considers K. to also be a “very special” woman and he feels “great” because his daughters “like her a lot.” *The chemistry John has with his partner* is very satisfying and contributes a lot to his vital life. He feels that they are genuinely compatible and motivate each other to be active and engaged in living their lives fully. “We both wake up happy,” notes John. They do a lot of things together including hiking, kayaking, shopping, and taking trips. Being with a partner with whom he has so much in common, and whom he respects and cares for, is extremely important for John’s well-being and his ability to currently live vitally because, in his words, “I’m living full days.” He reflects “if I

was living alone, I'd be a very unhappy person!" He believes that if he was living alone he would "start going downhill" and become "morose." These negative feelings and experiences would reduce John's ability to live vitality.

Engaging and sharing with friends and acquaintances is another important way in which John feels connected to others thus maintaining his vital life. He remains in contact with a friend from the Maritimes. Members of the hiking group that John and his partner "formed" a number of years ago also continue to be his friends. *He very much enjoys the "camaraderie"* that has grown over the years with this group of friends. He notes "I'm the oldest person in this group, by a long shot!" As well, over the years he has become friends with his next-door neighbour and continued to visit him when he was in palliative care.

Lifelong Learning, Education and Career

Lifelong learning and formal and informal education have played significant roles in John's ability to live a satisfactory and vital life. As a young adolescent John was sent to a Church of England boarding school in Windsor, Nova Scotia and reflects "that played a good part in my life...I liked boarding school!" *Learning to be a team player, negotiator and leader through sports* are lifelong themes that greatly enhanced his ability to live vitally in the past and the present. During his years at school John played football and did track, eventually becoming captain of both teams. He notes "my last year I was the head prefect." These were all experiences that helped John *develop a good work ethic and give his best effort* which he continued to do throughout his life and which continue to help keep his life a vital one. In mid-adolescence John was already showing *his lifelong capacity for emotional intelligence through his qualities of maturity, leadership, responsibility, trustworthiness, confidence, nurturing, and fairness.*

John went to university and got a degree in Biology (BSC). He notes “I had to work fairly hard to get through university. So maybe I would have liked to have been a little smarter!” However John is very clear that he is “*certainly smart about dealing with life!*” Together with emotional intelligence John has *lots of diverse life experience* which he recognizes has helped him to live a vital life. *Being curious and interested in many aspects of life* are themes that continue to contribute a lot to his current vital life. After graduating from university he began a career in sales with a business forms company eventually becoming the regional manager for the Atlantic Provinces and continuing on in that capacity until his retirement. In his early 40’s John went back to university and got his BA in Psychology because of his interest in the subject. He retired at age 60 years and reflects “I am certainly glad to be retired” because he has the time to fully engage in one of his passions—hiking.

Having a keen and active mind is a lifelong theme and is presently an important factor for John to live vitally. He questions whether or not he is learning anything new at the age of 82 years and then acknowledges that he reads “The Economist” every week and chuckling, he notes “it almost takes me a week to read it.” John comments “it helps keep me abreast of things that are going on in the world.” *When he teaches people how to do things, he is keeping his mind active, feeling good, and ensuring his own vitality.* He helped teach the members in his hiking group to snowshoe. At this stage in his life John believes that he *mainly keeps his mind keen through being with other people and engaging in activities, mostly physical.*

Keeping Active and Involved by Having, Developing, and Pursuing Interests

Keeping physically active and exercising are very important for John and currently are critical for him to engage in life fully and vitally. *Athleticism has always played a large role* in John’s vital life, and it continues to do so currently. Most of the interests that John has developed and continues to pursue involve a lot of physical activity and exercise. “I exercise a lot,” he

reflects. He credits a genetic inheritance of lots of energy for enabling him to be so physically active at his age. John has noticed that people who are not living their lives as vitally as he is are not as physically active. John began hiking after he retired. He is an avid hiker; he did the West Coast Trail at age 65 years. While he *loves the challenge and physicality of hiking*, he also makes sure that he has fun doing it. When John hikes in the mountains he feels euphoric. He reflects “you get endorphins—it’s a great feeling of euphoria when you’ve hiked four/five hours!” According to John, hiking along with spending time with his family has been his “life” since he retired. John continues to hike the North Shore Mountains twice a week with his hiking group and notes “it’s a five hour hike up in Seymour.” John also hikes from where he lives in West Vancouver to the Cypress Bowl lookout four times a week. He reflects “I’m still doing much the same things as I was doing when I retired.” John believes he is able to hike and keep up to much younger people because *he doesn’t view himself as old*. In part this perception ensures that *John continues to challenge himself and enjoy the sense of accomplishment he feels doing the activities he did when he was in his 60’s*.

John also *enjoys the challenge of hiking* because it can be somewhat unpredictable and conditions can change. He is able to handle that kind of “pressure.” *Being able to deal with pressure* ensures that John can still engage in activities that are exciting and stimulating for him. Having a routine of almost daily hikes balanced with *being open to whatever he experiences in each and every moment of a hike* motivates John to continue to live vitally. Connected closely to John’s love of hiking and other outdoor physical activities such as swimming, snowshoeing and kayaking is *the joy he takes in being in nature*. *His love of nature inspires him* and is a very important aspect of his vital lifestyle. When he hikes to Cypress Bowl he reflects “it’s just very, very, very attractive. There’s a stream through the trees.” *Enjoying being in nature* is a lifelong theme and one that continues to animate John and enrich his vital life.

Travelling is something that John has done a lot more of over the past 10 years and *is something he finds interesting and stimulating*. Together with K. (his partner) he has travelled to “France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, England and Costa Rica.” They have also done some *adventure travelling and hiking with Elder Hostel which John finds exciting and invigorating because it involves an element of risk-taking*. He describes the hike he did last year.

...we did a hike down the Colorado River and Marble Canyon which is part of the Grand Canyon. And we hiked five days in a row and there were about 14 people.

The last hike was the tougher one—1700/1800 feet up...It was difficult. And of the 14 people only seven did that hike. And K. and I were two of the seven. And we were with the top four that got to the top. So that was exciting!

“*Calculated risk-taking*” is something that John continues to practice because it *is exciting to accomplish something that is more challenging for him*. By calculated risk-taking John means he will look at something and if it’s something he thinks he can do “and there’s a certain risk to it, not serious risk” he will do it. *He is not someone who likes to take the “easier way” around things*. *Achievement through calculated risk-taking* is a facet of adventure that John enjoys, takes pride in, and is enlivened by, all of which contribute to his vital lifestyle.

Carrying On, Adapting, and Coping With Life’s Challenges

Carrying on, adapting and coping with life’s challenges are important themes threaded throughout John’s life that have greatly contributed to his ability to live vitally. *Having no serious regrets* means that John has a clear conscience and no “remorse.” *Not having remorse* helped John cope with the unimaginable loss he faced with the deaths of his sister who died from lung cancer, wife and oldest daughter who died from a “slow growing” brain cancer over a period of three years from 1994 to 1996. He has achieved this emotionally satisfying place of having no remorse by “*always*” *having “been there” for his loved ones* and this is very

comforting for John. Knowing that his wife had lived a rich, full, exciting, and rewarding life eased the grief of her passing for John. Knowing that he was 100% there for his wife and daughter and provided a loving, supportive and enriching life for them left him with *no regrets about the role he played in their lives*. This knowledge was instrumental for John to continue to live a vital life after they died. Having been faced with the necessity *to adapt to the challenges inherent in losing his most significant loved ones from a very young age and successfully doing that* appears to have imbued John with a sense of knowing that he can continue to create and live a deeply satisfying and vital life after the deepest of losses. “I just think that I’ve been able to deal with life—deal with the adversities that happen,” reflects John.

Being able to adapt and change are ways John has always coped with life’s challenges—ways that continue to be necessary for him to be living vitally at the age of 82 years. John has faced so many changes since childhood and has been able to successfully *adapt and reinvent his life to lesser or greater degrees*. John also *prepares himself as much as he can for what may happen next in his life*. He describes himself as someone who is “*always looking ahead* to how things can be, how things may turn out.” Connected closely to being able to adapt to changing situations is John’s *indomitable optimism*, a lifelong trait which continues to be important for maintaining his emotional health and a deep source of his vitality. John *views life through the lens of optimism* noting “*I’m eternally optimistic.*” “I just *tend to see the bright side of things*,” he comments.

Having a wonderful sense of humour, being able to laugh at himself and life’s unpredictability, and seeing the funny side of things as well as the serious side are important ways that John continues to live a satisfying and vital life. Throughout the interview John laughed and chuckled a lot and wasn’t shy about teasing me every once in a while. According to John, his partner, K. tells him that he has *a wonderful sense of humour. Being able to laugh with*

others including his family, friends, and acquaintances is an important way that John has fun which contributes a lot to his well-being and vital life.

The one challenge that John has yet to take on which he views as somewhat daunting is learning how to use a computer. He is relieved that he doesn't have to deal with learning to use computers because his partner is computer savvy and he feels it would be a struggle for him to have to learn this new technology.

Personal Agency, Reflection and Acceptance

Having personal agency including having choices and making decisions and having the capacity for reflection and acceptance is a critical means by which John continues to live a meaningful, satisfying and vital life. *Acceptance* is a lifelong trait that continues to be an important way that John *preserves his energy and dignity*. He notes "I can certainly accept things that I can't change!" *Accepting things he can't change* has been an important theme throughout his life and necessary for his well-being, peace of mind, and important fuel for his vital life. Currently John is finding that *self-acceptance is playing a larger role in his life*.

I can accept the fact that I can't hike as long or as high. So because I accept that and realize that it's part of life, I'm not disappointed. So, the fact that I'm able to accept what I can't change I don't have a disappointment!..

Not being disappointed because he can no longer do some of the activities he loves to the extent he was able to when he was younger empowers John and frees him from self-criticism and feeling down. Presently he just wants to continue to do the activities he loves as well as he can, knowing that the day will come when he will be walking rather than hiking and that he will be able to accept that.

John believes that you can't change people and he doesn't expect things from others that he knows they can't deliver. Interwoven with acceptance is understanding. *The ability to accept*

others as they are, not necessarily to forgive them, and to understand their “failures or flaws” means John doesn’t hold grudges. *Not holding grudges* is extremely empowering for John and an important way he maintains his emotional well-being and vitality. By accepting people for what they are capable of, understanding their flaws and not thinking “less” of them John has been able to *let go of unreasonable expectations for others and has had few disappointments in his life regarding others*. Not being disappointed means that *John doesn’t waste his time and energy worrying about and ruminating on things he can’t change*, thereby freeing up a lot more vitality to live the life he values.

Reflecting on life, especially his own life, has always been an important way that John understands others and himself. It appears that at age 82 years it is even more important and meaningful for John to reflect on life in order for him to gain insight which contributes to his sense of agency and vitally living. He comments “I do a lot of reflecting at my point in life!” John feels very good about his life and that he has lived it not only fully but also *following the values and principles that he has always held dear including taking the necessary actions to create the life he wanted*. He understands that this has been a major contributor to his vital life in the past and present. *By setting goals and taking the steps necessary to achieve these goals* John has empowered himself to make his dreams come true throughout his life and this is a deep well from which he draws vitality. John also understands that *having a positive attitude* is a critical component of an efficacious and vital life. *He views others through a positive lens which supports him in feeling hopeful about the present and the future*, something that enhances his ability to live a vital life. Nurturing his vitality means *he tries his best to “get along with people”* and this includes “crediting “them “with the positive things that they have in their life.”

John believes that it is critical for people in their 50’s and 60’s to “try and *build some bridges with ruptured relationships and to try and repair them if at all possible*” in order for

their lives to be vital when they are in their 70's and 80's. He reflects "I think that people who burn their bridges can suffer from it more when they're older." While John *strives to always do the right thing under every unique circumstance*, he *acknowledges that he has made mistakes*, none of them serious. He has reflected a lot on the mistakes he has made and understands that he has always had the ability to think things through and look at "the pros and cons" of any decision he has made. *Informed and thoughtful decision-making* means that John is assured that even if a decision he makes turns out to be a mistake it is "modified" because he did his best and this means that *he doesn't live with guilt*. *Having a sense of personal agency and being in control of his life by having choices and making decisions* are as important currently as in the past in order for John's life to be as vital as it is.

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose and living a worthwhile life are significant and critical for John's life to be vital. It is very important for him *to have people he is close to in his life* in order for it to be worthwhile. A very significant way in which John has always lived a purposeful and worthwhile life is *by helping and supporting people to live their lives to the fullest, something that he, himself, has always aspired to*. Through his financial and emotional support John helped make possible his wife's "marvellous career" in theatre and movies. He derived a great deal of pleasure from knowing he wholeheartedly encouraged her career choice from the time their four children were very young. *By living somewhat vicariously through his wife's exciting career* John's life was more interesting and thereby more vital. He notes "by enabling her to have this life I got a lot of reflected glory and I felt good about it." *Making things happen for others* has been and continues to be a very important way in which John sees his life as purposeful, worthwhile and vital. For example, he made information about this study available to friends and

acquaintances because he felt it would be a good thing for them to participate and that the study would benefit from their participation.

A major part of John's purpose and reason for living and something he has always wanted is being a father. He passionately reflects "part of my reason for living, for being on this face of the earth—to have had children!" John acknowledges that his children credit their upbringing with being a major reason why they have done so well and this makes him feel very good. From young adulthood John has been *extremely generative* and this *caring for, supporting and helping the younger generations* continues currently as he plays an important role in the lives of his grandchildren. John always provided his children and grandchildren with experiences that instilled in them the love and importance of family. He has helped his children and grandchildren financially as well as being there emotionally and physically for them when he was needed. John encouraged his children to buy homes and has helped them financially to achieve this goal. After one of his daughters divorced he moved into the home they had purchased together and was instrumental in being hands-on and helping raise his two very young grandchildren. He also helped another daughter raise her son when she divorced. He considers himself to have been *a significant male role model for some of his grandchildren*. He became a "mentor" for one of his grandchildren when he "was caught smoking marijuana" and was suspended from school for part of a term. John has helped pay for private schooling and a university education for his grandchildren. He believes that he has "helped bring about" a lot of his grandchildren's educational success and emotional well-being and that has made his life purposeful and meaningful. *Seeing his grandchildren "emerge," "grow up" and become "confident" and knowing he has contributed to their success makes John feel his life is vital.* John is aware that his grandchildren are growing up and don't need him in the same way as when they were younger. However he still continues to *derive a great deal of life satisfaction and*

purpose being an important part of his daughters' and grandchildren's lives and comfort knowing that if the time ever comes when he needs their support, they will be there for him.

At the beginning of his ninth decade John has seen a lot of things through to completion and *knows that he always gave his best to anything he attempted* which is very important and meaningful to him and makes him feel that his life has been and continues to be worthwhile. *Seeing the end result of something that he has personally strived for* such as reaching the top of a mountain *or something he has played a significant role in* such as supporting a grandchild to complete her university degree ensures John keeps “putting notches on his belt” as one of his daughters likes to say. *Knowing that his efforts have made a positive difference in his life and the lives of younger generations* is something that is extremely rewarding and vital for him. It is critically important for John to be “*a person of his word,*” *someone who can be trusted to “come through” for others and someone they can always “turn to” when they need help.* In John’s eyes being this person means that he is living a purposeful, meaningful, worthwhile and vital life.

John gets up in the morning *looking forward to every day because he “treasures” every day.* Treasuring every day is important to his sense of well-being and instrumental in maintaining his vital life. Since adolescence John has created *a life filled with enjoyable things to look forward to* whether it be playing sports, camping at Porteau Cove with his children and grandchildren, hiking with friends and/or family, adventure travelling, or spending time in Palm Springs with his partner and children. Connected closely to having things to look forward to is John’s *ability to plan.* While John lives and plans in the present he also plans for the future and both of these things make his life more vital. According to John planning runs the continuum of deciding what he will have for breakfast to being interviewed for this study to preparing for an adventure trip. He notes “*every day has to have something in it for me*” in order for him to feel his life is purposeful, worthwhile and vital.

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal and social responsibility are lifelong themes that John thrives on and that make his life meaningful and vital. It is very evident throughout the interview that John believes in the absolute necessity of being personally responsible and he proudly acknowledges “I’ve always been fine taking on responsibility.” He considers parenting to “possibly” be the most important lifetime responsibility and job. John also views his responsibility as providing the opportunities for his children and grandchildren to bond, become and stay close. He is very happy that the “interactions” he has encouraged among his grandchildren have “made them friends for life.” John finds it “reassuring to know” that his grandchildren “will also be there” for one another. *John takes responsibility for his own health.* He eats healthily and keeps fit. *John demonstrates social responsibility* by actively helping a chronically ill neighbour get to dentist appointments and taking him out for lunch in his wheelchair. Now that this man is in palliative care John walks his dog and visits him in the hospital.

John was able *to be socially responsible by volunteering* after he retired and moved to British Columbia. *Giving of himself by showing kindness and imparting his knowledge and wisdom to boys and adolescents* was meaningful and personally rewarding and continues to play a part in John’s current vital life. He volunteered for three years at the Willingdale Juvenile Detention Center for boys. He was active in the Big Brothers organization for a number of years both as a volunteer and for five years as a board member. *He is very humble about the importance of his role as a volunteer.* At the time he was involved in mentoring boys, John notes “the part I played in their lives didn’t seem to me so important” but upon reflection he understands that the relationship he had with them meant a great deal to them relative to what they had in their lives. Over time John has come to understand that he played a significant role in the lives of some of these young people. *Making a difference in the lives of other children*

beyond his own family members is not only gratifying for John but also *further solidifies his belief that there is “some significance to his being here”* and this contributes to his life being vital.

Not Taking Things for Granted, Loss and Accepting Inevitable Changes

Not taking things for granted and feeling fortunate for his life are themes that continue to play out in John’s life and have always been critical to his ability to live a meaningful and vital life. *Having an “appreciative disposition”* is something that John feels very fortunate to have had throughout his life. He is grateful for his health, his energy, his alertness, his family—including his partner K—and having financial security. *Loss of loved ones* is a lifelong theme and John’s *ability to come to terms with and accept not only that loss is an inevitable part of life but also that changes are tied to loss* has contributed greatly to his life continuing to be vital. John has reflected on his own mortality but does not dwell on it.

John is very grateful for his *good genes, good health and abundant energy* which he has experienced throughout his life and which he currently continues to have a lot of. He credits his parents and grandparents with having good genetics and notes “I’m eternally grateful to my parents and grandparents for passing those genes to me!” The only current health concern he has is high blood pressure which is under control through medication. He also has some arthritis in his knees. He notes “I’m seeing a lot of contemporaries, because they weren’t blessed with the health that I have, not living as fulfilling a life as I am.” John is very grateful that his mind is still alert and that he still has “most of his marbles.”

What is “surprising” to John are certain physical limitations that have started to appear in the past few years. Acknowledging and coping with *physical losses associated specifically with aging* are more recent themes that John is dealing with and have led to either not being able to do some of the activities he used or doing them with some alterations. For example, twenty years

ago he swam three-quarters of a kilometre at the pool; now he swims half a kilometre. Fifteen years ago he spent 15 days kayaking the Queen Charlotte Islands; now he kayaks close to home. John's balance has decreased in his 80's. He *is proactive* about lessening the impact of his declining balance and *compensating* for his decreasing balance. Currently he lifts weights and works out on the balance board to help his balance. While he easily hikes up mountains, he notes "but coming down...It takes me longer to come down than go up. John is cognizant that in order for him to keep climbing with the group he formed which is very important to him *he needs to be diligent about dealing with what is happening to his body as he ages*. John notes "I don't like terming it [physical change that comes with aging] as a problem." John makes it very clear that *he does not approach any aspects inherent in aging as a problem*. At age 82 years John continues to *view life as having challenges rather than problems*. This is a lifelong theme that is empowering and one that continues to sustain his vitality.

Having Financial Security

Having adequate finances throughout his life has been critical for John to live vitally. John believes that in order for him to live vitally he must enjoy life and in order to do that "money helps." John reflects on the *importance of having money available* to him from a trust fund which was from his father's life insurance policy. According to John, this enabled him to put a down payment on a house at 24 years of age and helped during the early years. *Being in a financially adequate position since retirement has enabled John to give his children and grandchildren a hand up financially* and this is an important way John feels he is living a vital life.

Currently being financially "comfortable" means that John doesn't have to worry about money. If he wants to take a trip with his partner who also is financially secure they can do it. If he wants to eat lunch out five times a week he can do it. *Being able to do anything he wants to*

do because he has the financial means ensures John is living the life he wants to live. John does point out, however, that *he is not “extravagant”* and that he drives a car that is seven years old.

John would advise people who are in their 40's, 50's and 60's to get *an RRSP (registered retirement savings plan) and/or a TFSA (tax free savings account)*. He thinks *this is critical for a vital life as one ages because “to really have a relaxed retirement you need to have the income.”* If John was talking to someone in their 40's he would tell them to make sure they were doing work that was satisfying for them; if the person was in his or her 50's John would suggest that they might be better to “stick it out” in order to make sure they had a pension and/or money saved for retirement. In order to have the kind of retirement that supports a vital life John believes *adequate finances are important*.

Having Role Models, Guiding Lights and Wonderful Memories

Having significant role models and “guiding lights” have been lifelong themes for John and currently continue to be a “source of happiness and well-being” and the reason he is the person he is and able to live a full and vital life at 82 years of age. According to John all of his role models have been women and he reflects *“women have always been the most important part of my life.”* He notes that throughout his life four generations of women “went into the making of me.” After his mother's death John's grandmother “took” him “in” and raised him. John reflects “I learnt so much from her!” She *modelled what it meant to deal with adversity while still retaining a sense of joyfulness and humour*. His grandmother taught him the lifelong importance of loyalty, family and creating good memories. As a young adult John *consciously made the decision to devote his life to his family thereby creating wonderful memories for himself as well as for them*. As he looks back on his life through a treasure trove of memories he notes “that makes me feel good about my life.”

John's paternal aunt also was influential in showing him the *importance of familial connection and support* as a way of living a full and vital life. She provided the impetus and financial means for an excellent boarding school education from young adolescence through high school and later, a university education. *John's mother, grandmother and aunt guided him and modelled the ethic of caring for and looking after others* and instilled in him a joy in carrying on and living life fully and vitally, and ultimately *showed him how to live hopefully*.

John takes a great deal of comfort in knowing that he is the "result" of the guidance and love from all the generations of women he has cared for so deeply. *John's wife, daughters, and partner have also been "guiding lights" for him and continue to inspire him to practice the values he learned growing up*. These younger generations of women have given John the opportunity "to do a little payback" and show the love and generosity that he was shown when he was young which makes him feel great.

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

The metaphor that John reflected on as representing living life vitally at age 82 years—"enjoy life, it's a short trip"—is something he genuinely believes and encapsulates how he has made meaning of the profound personal losses throughout his life and been able to cope and carry on in such a vital way. He reflects "it's [*enjoy life, it's a short trip*] tempered by the fact that my parents both died when they were young" and "I grew up with the aftermath of the first World War where close relatives died." What motivated John to carry on living a vital life in the past and presently was, in his words, "...at an early age I just realized that *time passes very quickly*." As an adolescent and young adult John decided "*to make the most of every day*" which meant that *he did the things he valued and wanted to do*. He reflects "I never wanted be able to say I wished I had done that, I wanted to make sure I actually did that." *Having very few regrets*

(none serious) by living fully every day to the best of his ability is a lifelong theme and continues to be a powerful way that John lives vitally.

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

As a tangible representation of what it looks like and means for him to live a vital life at 82 years of age John chose two photographs, one of which is a photo of his hiking boots from an article from the Vancouver Sun newspaper dated 1993. According to John his hiking boots represent the most important hiking essential—footwear—without which John wouldn't be able to hike. He reflects “hiking boots enable me to live this outdoor life that I live” because they “enable me...to go where I go.” *Hiking is John's passion* and the rapture he feels hiking in the outdoors is connected intimately to his “chi or life force” which drives his vital life. He reflects “I feel good about myself” when I reach the top of a mountain. The second photograph John chose to represent his current vital life was of his mother holding him as an infant. He notes that his mother was the first woman to positively impact his ability to live a vital life. She loved him and had the foresight during the Depression to provide him with a trust fund that gave him a financial start to live a full and vital life from young adulthood on.

Clarence: Accomplishing His Dreams and Living a “Fascinating” Life

Clarence is an 81 year old former president and CEO of a major grocery store chain, husband for 53 years, widower for approximately five years, father of two sons aged 55 and 50 years, grandfather of three, and great-grandfather of one. Clarence's narration of his experiences of being vitally engaged in living as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in his current life as well as newer themes that have evolved in his 60's, 70's and 80's. After being asked the questions, **“How are you living a vital life”** and **“What does living a vital life mean to you?”** Clarence opened up immediately and began his dynamic and passionate story of living a “fascinating, fast-acting, on the edge,” and ever vital life. Throughout

the interview his zest and excitement for living were palpable and numerous times he commented “I enjoy my life! Love it!..Wonderful, wonderful life!”

Lifelong Learning, Education and Career

Lifelong learning and education, both formally and informally continue to be passionate and critical themes that have positively impacted Clarence’s ability to live a full, exciting and vital life. He was born and raised in Cloverdale, British Columbia, the eldest of four children—three boys and one girl. His father was a farmer. Clarence recalls that growing up as “as very young kid in the Second World War” sparked a lifelong fascination for history and far off countries. It was in this early “facet” of his life that the seeds were “embedded” for his yearning and passion for “adventurous” travel and to eventually “go through all those sites [where World War II played out].” Clarence has a *keen and curious mind* which was evidenced early on in his life and he considers himself to be “*very inquisitive*” about the world and what makes things work and people behave as they do.

Clarence worked part time in the grocery business throughout high school and graduated from school with a grade 12 diploma. He began working full time at the same small grocery store chain where he had worked part time, quickly becoming an assistant manager, and by the age of 21 years, a store manager. While in his early 20’s Clarence married M. L. with whom he had two sons. He was a store manager for eight years and then became a District Manager which involved “lots of transfers and different portfolios.” At age 42 years, Clarence became the president and CEO of what is now a major grocery store chain. Clarence began the interview by talking about his career because he *believes his career was crucial to his ability to live a vital life currently*. He reflects “I’ve had a wonderful career and I’m very proud of it!”

Clarence’s *passion, dynamism, and love of competition and achievement* were evident as he summarized his “fascinating career” from start to finish. Clarence notes, it “was never, ever

dull...from the day I started to the day I ended” because it was “so competitive...fast-acting...on the edge.” With genuine pride Clarence speaks of being “fortunate” to be a CEO during the time his “team...set goals” and “took a small company from last place in market share to be number one in British Columbia.” *“I dedicated, almost, in a selfish way, my life, to attaining those goals,”* he states.

When Clarence worked in the retail side of the grocery business 80 hours a week for 12 years, his job was “totally demanding” physically and mentally. Later, when he became district manager and then president he was not physically in the office for as many hours a week but he was “mentally on the scene seven days a week,” having his “thoughts...always involved in the business” even on holidays. He reflects “the job never leaves you.” This eventually caused Clarence to begin to think about retirement when he was approximately 55 years of age. According to Clarence, for the next five years he and his wife “planned” their retirement. At age 60 years Clarence retired.

Belief in Self and Self-Acceptance

Interwoven with lifelong learning and curiosity is Clarence’s *unfailing belief in himself and his ability to set and accomplish goals and ultimately realize his dreams. Setting goals, acting on them, giving his best effort and ultimately accomplishing his goals* are things Clarence learned to do early on in his childhood and they continue to be important ways for him to realize his dreams and sustain a vital life. Connected closely to Clarence’s goal setting and realization of his dreams is his perception of *always having had a nature that was “a bit driven.” Once he made a decision he always tried his best to follow through and put forth the best effort possible.* He continues to live his life according to an old saying: “If a job’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well.” Clarence feels “wonderful” having done his best. He reflects “I only feel good when I do my best! If I go at something halfway, I feel terrible.” When Clarence does his best, whether or

not things “turn out,” he feels *proud of himself and his accomplishments* and that is a key factor that nurtures his well-being and feeds his dynamic and vital self.

During high school, while working part time for a small grocery store chain Clarence “bought a study” on Safeway, a company that “was the market leader” and that he “admired.” He notes “I learned a lot about them [Safeway] and I thought I saw some weaknesses.” He tells a story of *having a vision for himself and having the grit and determination to do whatever was required to eventually make his vision a reality*. At age 21 years Clarence asked “the top guy” for a store to manage even though he had to be married to be a manager and the youngest manager in the store chain was 29 years old. Clarence really believed he could “run” a store. He was given a store to manage and reflects “I failed in my first store!” Undaunted Clarence *learned from his mistakes*, went on to manage other stores and became “very successful.” Clarence’s *lifelong belief that he could accomplish anything that he wanted to accomplish if he set his mind to it and worked hard enough* was exemplified during the interview when he revealed that “impossible as it seemed” he always believed that one day he would be president and CEO of the company he started with as an adolescent.

Clarence has reflected on the “mistakes” he’s made in his life. “And I made lots” he states. “I made some doozies!” He acknowledges “I could have done better.” Clarence notes that if he had another opportunity at parenting “My God, would I ever be a better parent!” But he also shows *self-acceptance* and *self-compassion* by acknowledging that he thought he “was doing right” at the time. *Reflecting on and learning from his mistakes* has provided Clarence with a lot of *insight about himself and wisdom about life*. His regrets are few, and overall *he has come to this point in his life “feeling good about things”* and for him that is critical to being able to live vitally as an older adult. At the beginning of his ninth decade, Clarence is still accomplishing his goals, feeling great, and living a full, meaningful, and vital life because *he has*

learned to “come to grips with his shortcomings, his strong points” and “understands who he is.”

Embracing Change and Coping With Life’s Challenges

Six months after Clarence retired his wife had a stroke. According to Clarence that event “changed everything.” Although his wife lived for another 17 years, Clarence says, “our life was never the same.” His wife “always had a heart problem” and also developed cancer after having the stroke. So very soon after he retired and for the next 17 years Clarence became a caregiver to his wife. He openly admits that while “not blaming” his wife, he “was tied down, of course!” The adventurous retirement he had planned with his wife was no longer possible. *Carrying on and coping with life’s losses and challenges*, especially since his retirement, are themes that continue currently for Clarence. He faced numerous challenges throughout his very successful career and *dealt with them with immediacy and competency, always aware of the vision he had for the company*. During the interview Clarence was very clear that *he has always thrived on both being challenged and challenging himself*. However, with his wife’s stroke, Clarence faced losses and challenges of a different kind. While he could care for his wife and provide as full a life as possible for her, he had no control over changing the course of his wife’s illness over the subsequent 17 years.

Accepting what could not be changed, embracing what could be changed, and adapting were the major ways in which Clarence faced his personal challenges and dealt with having no control over his wife’s illness and maintained a meaningful and vital life. *By adapting his lifelong dream of “adventurous travelling,” to “simple types of travelling” like cruises*, which both he and his wife could do together, Clarence *reinvented his retirement plans*. He notes “M. L. and I had some good trips! Wonderful trips! But they were simple trips.” After his wife’s stroke, Clarence was compelled to “get involved in cooking and of course all the household

duties” thus further reinventing some aspects of his life. He became “*very involved*” *studying healthy cooking* because he found it “amazing” how much he didn’t know. Clarence makes his own bread and all his soups and continues to love to cook for friends and relatives. His *pride in doing a good job and satisfying both himself and others* is an integral part of feeling good which helps him cope with the challenges of life and ties into living vitally at 81 years of age. Clarence *balances welcoming change and adapting with maintaining a routine*. Throughout his working life and his retirement, Clarence has maintained a routine that he perceives to be a regimen. “I am regimented! My life is regimented” he declares. Having a regimen includes going for a long walk every morning, picking fruit for his porridge and taking his “lady friend” out on weekends. *Having a regimen* continues to be a significant way that Clarence *cope with stress, gets jobs done, and maintains a healthy lifestyle*, all important contributors to his current zestful life.

At the same time Clarence was dealing with the challenges inherent in having a disabled life partner, he was also dealing with the *challenges inherent in no longer having a notable career*. Clarence notes “When I entered retirement I fully realized that it’s *a loss of prestige*.” He notes that he had witnessed other people in positions of “prestige” and power retire and he was “fully prepared” for retirement. He expected that retiring would be difficult for him however he says “it wasn’t a big deal.” He comments that “the “hardest thing” for him “to get over” was the “loss of prestige” partly because “one day you’re somebody and the next day you’re nobody!” Clarence coped with this significant loss by *being open to change and welcoming new experiences* which are ways he continues to sustain his love of life and fuel his vitality. He points out that he “*welcomes the opportunity to try different things.*”

Clarence coped with the significant personal challenges he faced after retiring by becoming engaged in activities that were new to him, studying them, and feeling pride in learning to do them well. Clarence also coped with the challenges of caregiving and retirement

by *simplifying his life*. Clarence, *being proactive*, sold most of his possessions including a number of properties and a plane, and moved to a smaller home in a gated community. In doing so he says he learned a valuable lesson in how to live more vitally. He reflects “*what a lesson I learned there! Less is better! Man, did that ever simplify our lives!*” As an older adult Clarence learned “all you need is just what you’re really comfortable with.” He reflects that “*simplification*” ties into living a vital life presently because “*it gives me the time to do things.*”

Clarence’s wife “passed away” approximately five years ago and he notes that her death was “a tough, a tough deal!” and “a very dramatic change” and that there was “nothing” he could do about it. Clarence believes it is his ability to adapt to change that has allowed him to carry on and continue to live a full and vital life in the five years since his wife died. He acknowledges that “sad moments” come up for him “continually” but that over time there is “healing” and he comments “*I get on with my life cause I do adapt to new things!*” According to Clarence the hardest thing for him is “not having anybody to share the memories” with.

A few days before the interview, Clarence found out that he has prostate cancer. “Well my next challenge is the prostate cancer!” stated Clarence and “I don’t know how that’s going to turn out.” In a straightforward and down-to-earth manner, Clarence reflects that he is going to face and deal with the challenge of having prostate cancer by “ignoring it” for the time being. He says “I’ll face up to it on May 5th” when he meets with his doctor. Until then he says, “*I’m going to go ahead and live my life...as far as living my life, nothing’s changed.*” Faced with the challenge of having prostate cancer, Clarence has *decided to carry on and live his life as fully as he can accepting that there may be some “curtailment” to his travelling*. Until the diagnosis of prostate cancer, Clarence’s only health problem was high blood pressure which is under control.

Keeping Busy and Involved by Having, Developing, and Pursuing Interests

Throughout his life, Clarence *kept very busy with his extremely demanding career and his family*, which sustained his very vital life. In addition he has *lots of enthusiasm, which permeates everything he does* and was evident throughout the interview. Clarence believes that *maintaining his keen mind through being interested in everything around him* is critical to living an involved and vital life. He is *engaged and interested in diverse activities*, some lifelong, others more recent. From a young age, Clarence enjoyed building model airplanes from “scratch” something that he was not able to do very much of when he was raising a family. He states “I had always raised a huge vegetable garden and put all that stuff in the freezer for the winter.” Clarence *believes in being fit and used to run regularly. He now walks every morning.* After retiring Clarence had time to become involved in what he calls “hobbies.” The hobbies that Clarence engaged in *challenged him to risk, study, learn, understand and become competent, all important contributors to his living a vital life then and now.* He notes “*I have an interest in an awful lot of things!*” Clarence took a course in raising bees as well as a naturalist’s course and reflects on how his eyes “were really opened” to different ways of thinking, feeling and living as a result of these courses.

Clarence doesn’t consider himself to be “a brave person” but he has always *thrived on being a risk taker and says he has no “fear” of challenging experiences or activities.* Perhaps the most vivid example of Clarence’s risk taking attitude and fearlessness is when, *at age 62 years, he realized a lifelong dream of learning to fly.* He “flew ultralights” and laughingly admits to training with 17 year olds. “I put in a thousand hours” and “I did that until age seventy” he notes. Clarence says he “had a lot of fun” learning to fly and reflects “*I’m very proud of that accomplishment!*” *Being able to achieve a dream he had since childhood, a dream that required*

dedication, competence, acute physical and mental skills, enduring long hours of training, and guts was tremendously rewarding and continues to fuel his current vital life.

Clarence notes that he loves politics. He reflects on *the importance of paying attention to other points of view and learning from others* about their interests because “all these sort of things open doors into all these different areas.” Clarence loves sports, uses the internet, and enjoys playing the stock market. He watches television, mainly the news and documentaries because he “learns something” from them. He reflects “*I’m fascinated by everything that goes on.*” Clarence says, “*I just live my life.*” In order to live vitally as an older adult, Clarence suggests that people in their 50’s and 60’s should *develop a keen interest in everything happening around them*. He would advise the younger generations to “*get out and go to things and see things and think about things.*” Clarence believes it is critically important for younger generations to be involved in politics and “stay abreast of the news” so that they know what’s going on both at home and around the world. He thinks that younger generations need to *be engaged in activities, have interests, challenge themselves to do difficult things, and enjoy what they are doing*.

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things, and Living a Worthwhile Life

Having a purpose, looking forward to things, and living a worthwhile life have always been instrumental for Clarence to live fully and vitally. Clarence has spent his life *looking forward to living fully every day*. Currently *he is passionate about taking “adventuresome trips,”* something he always longed to do when he retired but was not able to until his wife died and he was “freed” from the caregiving role. “Adventuresome” travelling over the past five years has contributed significantly to Clarence’s fulfillment of a lifelong dream and drives his current exciting and vital life. As he talks about his many amazing far off journeys the energy he gives off is electric. Since his wife died five years ago, Clarence has seen a lot of the world and he has

seen it the way he always dreamed of seeing it. He has travelled to the Middle East, Egypt, Jordan, Moscow and Beijing. He travelled “from Athens through the Mediterranean” and North Africa. He “sailed the South Atlantic” and went all the way “down the east coast of South America.” Clarence travelled to South Africa, went to the Beijing Olympics, and “recently spent a month in India.”

Clarence describes his current way of travelling as “*taking the road less travelled*” and in so doing *learning and “better understanding” countries and their people, cultures and religions.* This *depth of understanding* is something that in older adulthood is important and meaningful for him and enriches his sense of living a purposeful, worthwhile and vital life. In order to understand life on a deeper level Clarence feels it is *essential to observe and “see.”* According to him, *observing leads to seeing which leads to understanding*, key factors in supporting him to look forward to things and feel he is living a worthwhile and vital life. Travelling in India was a revelation for Clarence because he came to understand how so many people can live happy, full, and worthwhile lives with little financial means.

Trying to be “*a good example,*” a “*role-model,*” and a “*mentor*” are lifelong themes and are currently especially important for Clarence to feel that his life is purposeful and worthwhile. *Being generative* contributes greatly to his ability to look forward to life and feel that he has *provided a solid example for the younger generations to live a life with values, passion, excitement, vitality, caring for others and achieving their dreams.* When he sees the results of his showing or mentoring or leading by example he comments that “it makes me feel, feel good, real good!” Clarence is quick to point out that *being generative truly is a result of “just living the life I want to!”* Clarence credits his mother with being an excellent role model for living a vital life and instilling in him the importance of providing a good example for living vitally for younger generations. He notes “my mother lived a full life.” It is *very important* for Clarence to *spend*

time with younger generations, and gain an understanding of their perspective and by so doing, deepen and broaden his own perspective on life.

Clarence says, “I wasn’t always a good example. I mean I worked too long...I spent too many hours on business...” As a wiser, older adult Clarence declares “*But I try now to be myself and be a good example, a very good example.*” Clarence is extremely generative in *sharing his abundant knowledge and wisdom with the younger generations*. He admits it is important to him to teach and “show” his grandchildren and great-grandchild “what it means to be family” by providing opportunities for them to “talk, as a unit, and get together as a unit and enjoy each other and get to know each other.” Clarence believes that in order for the generation after him to live meaningful, worthwhile and vital lives in their 70’s and 80’s they *need to “mix with people, especially people that are younger.”* He believes people in their 50’s and 60’s should be listening to what the younger generations are saying and learning how they think. Clarence acknowledges that *a lot of his vitality has been fuelled by spending time with younger people.*

Having a Positive Attitude and Having Fun

Having a positive attitude is a significant factor contributing to Clarence’s love of living. Being positive ensures that he feels his life is purposeful, meaningful, and worthwhile, sparking his energy and sustaining his vital life. He describes himself as being “a fairly happy person” who has reached “a very happy time” in his life by envisioning and creating the life he presently lives. Clarence said he is not sure whether or not he has a sense of humour, but throughout the interview he chuckled often, laughed frequently both at life’s vagaries and at himself and revealed *a well-developed sense of humour*. Clarence notes that “once you get past health” *having “a positive outlook”* is critical for living a meaningful and vital life. He believes that a lot of people he knows and observes who are not living vitally in older adulthood “dwell on the negatives” and live in the past “locked into memories” instead of looking forward to the present

and future. Clarence views non-vital living older adults as being disengaged from life and the world around them mainly because they take part in no activities, have “shallow” interests, are not “inquisitive” and don’t exercise. In order to live a vital life as an older adult Clarence believes it is necessary “*to look forward to things and get excited about things and get involved in thinking about things.*” He also believes that some older adults who are living a less vital life than he is are “envious” of people whose lives are exciting and fascinating and more vital than their lives. With conviction *Clarence comments that he doesn’t envy anyone.* Clarence perceives the biggest difference between himself and non-vital older adults as being “mentally, they think they’re old! And therefore, they become old!” At age 81 years Clarence *does not view himself as old.* He doesn’t feel old. However he knows and observes people who “have fallen into the trap” of thinking they’re old at age 50 years.

Tied into having a positive attitude is Clarence’s *ability to have fun*, a lifelong theme that continues to enrich his vital life presently. Clarence reflects that because he has such an interest in the world and everything going on around him “that, shoot, the days are fun!” Having fun makes looking forward to things an everyday occurrence for Clarence. He says that he can’t wait to get out of bed in the morning because he has so much to look forward to in his life each and every day. “*I like my life! I like me!*” Clarence exuberantly comments.

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

“*I’ve always been totally responsible*” states Clarence. He notes “*I like responsibility! I like it! I enjoy it.*” Assuming responsibility is something that Clarence has done throughout his life and something he considers to be an important contributor to his ability to currently continue to live a vital life. He suspects that the seeds of taking responsibility were sown in his childhood, largely because he was the eldest child. At the age of 50 years Clarence reached “a turning point” in his life in part because he says he “saw people that weren’t enjoying themselves” either

because of poor health or poor attitude. He decided he wanted to live a healthy life. He began to *take a great deal of responsibility for his personal health and well-being and has continued living a healthy lifestyle*. He decided to stop drinking alcohol and smoking at age 50 years. He also decided that he was going to “eat properly.”

Being healthy is very important to Clarence and is critical for him currently to live a vital life. He believes that people who are not living as vital a life as he is, tend to have poorer health, which they either could not have changed no matter what they did or which could be a result of not living a healthy lifestyle, including lack of exercise and good nutrition. Clarence would advise people in their 50’s to ensure that they practice a healthy lifestyle including exercising, eating lots of fresh vegetables and fruits, and limiting sweets and saturated fats. Clarence has a “*principle*” that he lives by and that is “*not to live to be 120, but to live well and be able to do anything I want as far as my health is concerned in the years that I’ve got left.*” He admits to having “a huge appetite” and loving bread, potatoes, fish and chips, and ice cream but *practices self-discipline* and “limits” intake of the foods he loves that have saturated fats and salt.

Clarence was a responsible husband for 53 years and *showed integrity* caring for his wife throughout the seventeen years of her illness. Overall, he considers being a parent “the most responsible thing” in his life. Clarence is “*the champion of his family*” in many ways. When there is “a family problem” he notes “I usually get involved!” He attempts to support family members in resolving any issues or problems that may arise. Clarence acknowledges that he is looked up to by his family.

In an approximately 40 year career in “the grocery business” Clarence took on more and more responsibility as he climbed the career ladder. He says the extent of his responsibility was huge. He recalls the interconnection between achievement and responsibility in taking “the company from just a few employees up to over six-thousand, over a billion dollars a year in

sales” and in “creating good jobs for those folks.” Clarence felt a lot of responsibility toward his employees. *“I did care a lot about the employees. I really did.”* It was important for him to do his best “to see that every employee was treated fairly.” *To the best of his ability Clarence committed himself to improving the well-being of his employees. Having no regrets regarding his responsibility to his employees* is an important contributor to his present vital life.

Not Taking Things for Granted, Loss, and Accepting Inevitable Changes

As an older adult Clarence *feels very fortunate for the life he has, past and present* and he *does not take things for granted*. He continues to *feel very blessed and “so lucky” for the many experiences, opportunities and people throughout his life*. Clarence is grateful for “the foundation of a good family life.” He feels fortunate to have had an exciting and prestigious career in which he never experienced “being bored.” Clarence feels very grateful that he decided to change his lifestyle to a healthier one when he was 50 years old. Having had this very exciting, healthy, and meaningful life is very important for Clarence and he considers it critical to sustaining his ability to live vitally today. He *“still likes the excitement of doing things.”* Overall, Clarence feels that for him there is very little difference between being 81 years old and being 50 years old.

Clarence feels fortunate to have had a career that provided him with the *financial freedom to pursue the lifestyle he continues to presently enjoy*. He considers himself to be “well off” and recognizes that this has been a result of hard work and vision on his part as well as “luck.” *Being “well off”* contributes considerably to Clarence’s fascinating and vital lifestyle. Having financial freedom allows Clarence to travel anywhere he wants and anyway he wants. He can “play the stock market.” He can go to the theatre. He can go out to dinner. However Clarence is also cognizant that people can still learn and travel the world vicariously if they don’t have the financial means to travel. While he would advise people in their 50’s and 60’s to travel

as much as they can, he also recognizes that if people cannot afford to travel they can still “learn so much through books and documentaries.”

The changes that Clarence acknowledges have occurred for him in his eighth and ninth decades tend to be physical ones and there is *some loss associated with these changes*. He doesn’t have “the balance” that he did up until his later 60’s. Decreasing balance was the reason he retired from flying. As well, he describes not being able to get out of chairs as easily as he used to. Clarence has *come to accept the physical changes he endures due to aging*. He feels some embarrassment that his “hearing’s not sharp.” “My eyesight deteriorated” Clarence reflects but laser treatments worked well and now he can see “reasonably good.” His “sexual drive” has lessened but he *“goes with the flow.”* None of the above losses have stopped Clarence from doing the activities he enjoys because he believes he’s “lucky enough” and “healthy enough” to currently do whatever he wants, *accepting that there may be some limitations* to his participation.

At 81 years of age Clarence has been sorely tested by loss in his life. Some of the significant losses he has faced include retiring from a prestigious career and the deaths of his parents, wife and friends. He has learned *“to face up” to both the losses and the changes wrought by them* in order to continue to live a life he values and believes is tremendously vital “At my age I’ve gone through a lot...I’ve seen horrible times—terrible grief,” he reflects. Clarence *views death as a part of life* that eventually happens to everyone. *While Clarence has thought about his age and his mortality, he certainly doesn’t dwell on it.*

Having a Sense of Personal Agency

Having a sense of personal agency including having choices, making decisions, problem-solving and having freedom is a critical means by which Clarence’s sustains a vital life. *Having freedom of choice* continues to be empowering and important for Clarence’s well-being and he

does not take it for granted. Since retiring Clarence *wants to make his own decisions and act on them*. His *recipe for living a vital life consists of three steps: “face it [the problem]; decide the action; and do it!”* He knows that if he doesn’t face his problems and make informed decisions, the problems “eat away” at him and erode his vitality. Clarence acknowledges that he feels fear at the prospect of losing control over decision-making which would mean losing control over his life. “I guess the fear in my mind would be the picture of sitting in an old folk’s home slobbering in a corner and somebody making all my decisions for me,” he reflects.

Having an extremely demanding career and having been married for 53 years—17 of those years as a caregiver—and being a widower for five years, Clarence understands that he currently has something he’s never had, “this *freedom to come and go!*” He says he has found “this freedom to do anything I wanted when I wanted!” *Freedom to make all his own decisions without having to compromise with anyone else and to be able to do anything he wants to do* is a powerful factor in his ability to currently live a fully engaged and vital life. Clarence calls this kind of freedom “critical” to his happiness and vitality.

While Clarence is interested in and enjoys a diverse range of activities, he is also *very selective about what he chooses to do*. *Being selective frees Clarence to do the things he wants to do when he wants to do them*, a very important aspect of *feeling in control of* and enjoying his life and contributing to his living vitally in the present. In reflecting on the past he says, “What was right then I guess is what I’m trying to say, is not right now!” What’s right for Clarence now is “a very simple life or household, nothing complicated” and the freedom to do what he wants to do. He explains that at age 81 years “...I do what I want to do, as long as it’s legal and as long as I’m not hurting anybody!” He admits “And quite frankly, *I don’t care about what other people think!*”

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Having had a close, loyal, and loving relationship with his wife through good and difficult times over 53 years of marriage and *having raised two sons together* has contributed to Clarence's ability to live a rich and vital life both in the past and presently. Along with raising their sons, Clarence and his wife *shared quality time with their grandchildren*, travelling, house parties and time away in their place in Palm Springs. He reflects "I've lost my wife which is a sad thing." At this point in his life, Clarence wishes his wife was here to enjoy the life he has today and he'd love to be able to talk about their life together and all the memories they shared. But he reflects "that's not to be!" Clarence credits his wife with keeping their family together when she was alive noting "it's not easy in these modern times."

Having close, caring, and supportive relationships with his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchild, contributes to a meaningful and vital life for Clarence. He believes that it is important to keep the family together, so *he has taken over his wife's role* in that regard, noting "I just took that over and really got into it!" According to Clarence, keeping his family together also includes having a good relationship with his two brothers, sister, cousin and in-laws and getting together with them from time-to-time. "It's comforting! It's comforting to have family like that," Clarence reflects. He finds it *comforting as an older adult to know he has a strong and caring connection with his siblings and extended family*. Clarence is comforted knowing that "when things get tough, really tough they're there...They're there when you need them." He notes "I think, as far as my sister and my brothers, I think we're closer than we ever were." More and more, Clarence realizes *the importance of a close "family unit."* Clarence is quick to point out that while he is close with his siblings and cousin, "we're not in each other's laps." He states very clearly that *he is "completely self-reliant"* and *he takes "great pride in that*

Clarence believes that *the chemistry he has with a woman is “very important”* and contributes to his living a vital life at age 81 years. He reflects “I love being with a woman!..I need and want to be with a woman.” He delightfully describes how much he likes looking at a “pretty woman” and “loves to take a woman out.” Currently Clarence is “taking out a woman” who “was brought up in the Middle East” and he is enjoying learning about her culture and eating the food she loves. He says that he enjoys “going on dates” and seeing movies and plays “through the eyes of a woman.” He notes that he likes to “discuss current matters” with his lady friend. Clarence hopes that the *excitement and pleasure he derives from being with a woman* never changes. According to Clarence, *having a close and affectionate relationship with a woman* is important for a “well-rounded” and vital life.

Reflecting on Life and Knowing and Understanding Oneself on a Deeper Level

In older adulthood Clarence has *reflected deeply on his life* and has *come to know and understand himself on a deeper level*. As much as Clarence loves being with a woman, he is adamant that he’ll “never live with one again.” He has no intention of getting married again. In more recent years, Clarence *believes he has gained a deeper understanding of life, of people and of change*. He has reached this deeper understanding through reflection and looking beyond the surface of things. Clarence has *strived to understand “how people are changing, how they’re thinking, what is going on in their lives”* and *this desire for reflection and understanding* is meaningful and contributes to his ability to live a vital life. As Clarence reflects on the importance of deeper understanding of others, he comments “well maybe it’s applying that then to me. *I try and understand myself. Who I am, you know.*” *By seeking to understand others, Clarence comes to know and understand himself on a much deeper level*. He declares “*I’m very comfortable in my skin...*” As he has gotten older Clarence says he has become more comfortable with himself, an important factor in sustaining his vital life.

Clarence has reflected deeply on his life and the meaning of his life's journey. *He views his life as multifaceted*—childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, career (employee/employer), marriage (husband), children (father), healthy lifestyle advocate, grandparent (mentor), retirement, pilot, caregiver, keeper of the family, great-grandparent, adventurer traveller—and reflects on what was involved in each of these facets and how each facet was “exactly right at the time.” Clarence recognizes that *all of these facets contributed to his rich life experience and provided him with the necessary strength to live a vital life in the face of all the challenges he has faced*. According to Clarence *life experience and living and learning fully in each facet of his life* has been the major contributor to the incredible vital life he lives today. As Clarence “looks back on his life” and “just thinks about his life” he notes that he “sees some turns that were good and I’ll see some turns that were bad” and acknowledges “my life goes like that, all through the different facets!”

At 81 years of age Clarence is reflecting a lot on selfishness, a character trait he believes he possesses, is “not proud of,” but considers necessary for him to live a vital life. “*I think I’m selfish*” he notes. In the past Clarence “dedicated” his working life to attaining his career goals of becoming president and CEO of his company to “the exclusion” of the time he could have spent with his family. Currently Clarence questions whether or not doing what he wants to do now is selfish. He says “I do what I want! Is that selfish? I don’t know.” He reflects “*I just simply do what I want to the exclusion of almost everything else*, other than the normal social responsibilities that I have.” According to Clarence having largely unrestricted freedom ignites his exciting and vital life.

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

Clarence’s metaphor for his vital life is “nature” and “the natural evolution of the seasons” which he passionately describes in the following way:

I enjoy the different seasons...and I've been watching the buds and all of a sudden they leaf this morning, the shrubs. I enjoy when I envision that. I love walking when there's rain as long as I'm dressed for it. I love walking in the snow. I like the way that nature adapts to change! I love the way that nature and animals adapt to change. So I guess I would envision a picture of plants, shrubs, trees, animals...I love that!

Loving nature and enjoying being in nature continues to inspire Clarence and contributes a lot to his current vital life.

Tangible Representation for Living a Vital Life

Clarence chose as a tangible representation of what it means for him to currently be living a vital life three photographs of a cottage he helped build on Parker Island (a very small island “only reachable by boat”) shortly after he retired and one photograph of the view off the front deck. These photographs capture a full image of Clarence at the age of 81 years—a man who by *embracing change, welcoming new experiences wholeheartedly, living fully in the moment, and having a wealth of profound memories* he was greatly instrumental in creating is living an intensely exciting, passionate and vital life. In the sharing of the building of the cabin with family members under some very difficult conditions and the enjoyment derived from spending quality time at the cabin with loved ones, Clarence notes he co-created incredibly happy, comforting, and “very *meaningful memories* that go a long way in sustaining my current vital life.” He reflects that these memories provide him with *hope that his life will continue to be a vital one in the future*. Ultimately, Clarence came to understand that the physicality, the “hard, hard, hard work,” the steep “learning curve,” and the planning involved in the building process gave him “*an appreciation for a completely different way of life*” and it *opened his “eyes to an awful lot of things!”* To take on a “complicated” physically and mentally demanding building

project at the age of 62 years believing he was “useless” at this kind of work revealed *determination and confidence* on the part of Clarence. Clarence states that the entire cabin building process “certainly kept me vital and alive and learning,” and not just for that period of time but continuing on in the present.

Henry: Keeping Busy and Enjoying Life, ever a Renaissance Man

Henry is an 85 year old retired family doctor, husband for almost 55 years, father of one daughter and three sons aged 46 years to 53 years, and grandfather of six. Henry’s narration of his experiences of being vitally engaged in living as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in his current life as well as newer themes that have evolved in his 70’s and 80’s. After being asked the questions: **“How are you living a vital life?”** and **“What does living a vital life mean to you?”** Henry paused and said “Well, I used to have a very worthwhile life until I retired because I was in medicine.” Then, in a calm, soft-spoken, and often eloquent voice, at times reciting poetry, this man of dignity began his story of living a vital life, frequently noting the importance of *not taking himself too seriously, enjoying life, and keeping active*.

Lifelong Learning and Education

Lifelong learning and education, both formally and informally have been, and continue to be, crucial themes in Henry’s life that contribute to his living a satisfying and vital life. Henry was born and grew up in a middle class family in England, the eldest of two sons. His father participated in both World Wars, eventually becoming a brigadier; in civilian life he was a businessman. Henry’s mother was a homemaker. Henry learned music, “both instrumental and vocal,” as an adolescent and *music has been a profound influence* in his ability to live a meaningful and vital life. He began learning how to play the cello at 14 years of age and “carried on with that during university.” Henry was 15 years old at the beginning of World War II and

lived through “the Blitz,” a period of intense bombing of London and other cities that began in September of 1940 and continued until May of 1941. He learned early on that death is part of life. Henry graduated with a medical degree from Oxford University in England in 1947 at 23 years of age and went into medical practice as a family doctor. He notes “In those days we didn’t have antibiotics and penicillin, it was just coming in. We didn’t really have useful drugs at all.” Henry reflects on *having to “learn all these things as the years went by.”*

After approximately five years practicing family medicine in England, Henry immigrated to Canada in 1952, at 27 years of age, and came to the Lower Mainland of British Columbia where he had an intern position waiting for him at a major hospital. Within 10 days of arriving in Canada, “I joined the local orchestra,” laughs Henry. Henry married his wife whom he had met at Oxford University in 1955, and together they raised four children. Throughout his medical career, Henry *stayed abreast of new happenings in medicine and “kept his practice up to date”* by coming into Vancouver “twice a year to attend a course of [professional] lectures.” According to Henry, this *continued learning also “kept his mind going,”* something he believes is critical for living a vital life. *Currently Henry attends a discussion group at UBC* consisting of participants who are all “seniors,” and he reflects “*I try to keep my mind active through these discussions.*” He continues to enjoy reading non-fiction, reciting poetry, reading Shakespeare’s plays, and learning about history and politics.

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life

According to Henry, *living a purposeful and worthwhile life* is “the whole point of being.” There are a number of significant lifelong themes woven throughout Henry’s life that have contributed to his having lived, what he believes has been, a purposeful and worthwhile life. *Religion and spirituality are critical themes* that have provided an unshakeable foundation on top of which Henry has been able to build a life filled with purpose and Henry considers this

foundation essential in continuing to support his current ability to live a meaningful, worthy and vital life. Good humouredly, Henry says “Well, as you know, as a Christian, I like to try and be a good Christian.” *In striving to be a good Christian, Henry notes “I try to do worthwhile things.”* So he goes to church every Sunday and he sings in the choir, which he says he enjoys very much. Henry acknowledges that he derives the strength to live a vital, energetic and satisfying life currently because “emotionally...*it’s probably religion that gives me the will to live and to strive.*” Henry reflects “I feel as a Christian I’m sort of...following Jesus.” Reflecting deeper, Henry says “if one’s philosophy of life is that one’s sort of put on earth in order to, *to worship God and love your neighbour*, then this *is the motive for everything one does.*” Henry believes that *developing a spiritual life in one’s 50’s or 60’s is also important for having a vital life when one is in his or her older years.*

Henry believes that he was *helping people, and making their lives better* throughout his career as a family physician. Intricately interwoven into Henry’s living a worthwhile life were the *joy and satisfaction that he got “out of being able to help people.”* He notes “I used to get a lot of enjoyment out of my practice.” Along with retirement from an extremely fulfilling career, Henry, at the same time, also experienced no longer being allowed to volunteer after approximately *18 years as a mentor of children and youth* in a well-known national organization and after *25 years volunteering in a children’s summer camp.* The reason given to him was that he was “too old.” So Henry decided that he would take his expertise to another country and *at 70 years of age he began volunteering at a hospital in Haiti*, something he continued to do for two months every year for nine years. *Knowing that he was still able to be involved in making people’s lives better* was very rewarding for him and enabled him to continue to live what he considered to be a worthwhile life. He was 78 years old when he stopped volunteering in Haiti. This was a difficult time for Henry and he reflects “I was doing nothing that was any good to

anybody else at all!” Laughing and showing his sense of humour, Henry comments that it “wasn’t too difficult” to feel he was *living a “useful” and productive life* which is a large part of living a worthwhile life for him, *when he was working and volunteering*.

The main difference between how Henry views living vitally in the past and living vitally currently is that, in the past, through his medical career and his meaningful volunteering, he believes he was living both a worthwhile and a vital life. Currently, he acknowledges living a very busy and active life—most certainly, a vital life. However, *Henry no longer believes that his life is as useful or as worthwhile*. He notes “nowadays, everything I do [his activities] is more or less neutral in that respect,” with one exception, which is “singing in the choir.” Nowadays Henry feels that most of the activities he does are not very useful to others and do not make a difference in their lives. Throughout the interview there was a sense of Henry’s *yearning to continue, from his perspective, to be “useful” and to live a worthwhile life by “helping” other people*. Although Henry misses actively making a difference in people’s lives, he knows and understands that he has left a legacy of making people’s lives better, not only in Canada, but also in Haiti.

Having something to look forward to is a lifelong theme and is important for sustaining Henry’s vital life. He looks forward to having family come for a visit, learning about and doing woodwork and playing and listening to music. *Music has played a meaningful and pivotal role throughout Henry’s life* and currently continues to be *something he looks forward to* ensuring his well-being and sense of purpose and continuing to live a worthwhile life. Until recently, Henry “enjoyed” playing the chamber music of “Hayden, Mozart, and Beethoven” on a regular basis with his wife and friends. Currently, he tries to meet once a week with a friend to play music, and finds that if he isn’t “involved in it” he “misses it.” Henry notes that he still makes the effort to go to concerts “from time-to-time,” especially if it’s a cellist coming to the nearby Chan

Center. According to Henry, he is *having “fun” and “living vitally” when he is involved playing music.*” Playing the cello has always been a pivotal thread in the tapestry of Henry’s vital life and continues to be to this day.

Keeping Busy and Involved by Having, Developing, and Pursuing Interests

Throughout his life, Henry has had a *good work ethic, kept very busy with his career, enjoyed volunteering, and had diverse interests*, all of which have nurtured a fulfilled and vital life. Connected closely to having a good work ethic is *giving his best effort* in everything he does. Henry reflects “the first 23 years of my life, I was studying hard to be a doctor.” He notes “then, when I retired, I got bored. When he retired from his career and volunteering, a major portion of what had made Henry’s life meaningful, fulfilled, and vital, was now not available to him. So he went about *reinventing part of his life* by becoming interested in and busy doing, enjoyable and at times, challenging activities. Approximately 5 ½ years ago Henry and his wife moved to their present home at UBC, in part because Henry wanted to be close to the many physical, academic and cultural activities that were offered there. Henry comments “*I had nothing to do so I started developing a whole lot of hobbies*, some of which I had before and many of which I’m still doing.” Chuckling, Henry commented that he no longer paints landscapes or goes fishing, because eventually he wasn’t satisfied with the results from both.

According to Henry people his age who are not living vital lives differ from him in that they “look a bit depressed sometimes,” especially the people he sees in “nursing homes” and he thinks “what a miserable kind of life.” Henry also believes that people whose lives are not as vital as his are not “doing things,” and not “keeping active.” Henry reflects that *it is only by being actively involved in living that “one can keep sane and healthy.”*

Henry acknowledges that in order for him to live a meaningful and vital life at 85 years of age *he needs to continue to balance his interests and activities so they allow for mental,*

physical, and spiritual engagement. Because Henry no longer practices medicine and his volunteer activities are limited, he has had to *compensate by continuing with the activities like hiking and cycling that he can still do at 85 years of age, albeit at a slower pace, and developing new interests and activities that “keep himself busy” “amused,” provide meaning in his life, and* certainly contribute greatly to his ability to continue to live vitally.

Currently Henry *has a diverse routine of activities and interests* which he follows throughout the week and which would be daunting for many people much younger than he is. He has specific days for participating in the woodwork shop at Brock House, which is a new endeavour for him, cycling with the cycling club, playing chamber music or participating in a string quartet or orchestra, singing in the choir, taking part in a discussion group for seniors at UBC, hiking with his hiking group and going bird watching, which is a more recent activity that he has taken up. Henry is very aware that for him, *not only engaging in old and new interests and activities in later adulthood, but also enjoying them* is critical for living a vital life. Henry also belongs to a “Shakespeare reading group” which meets once a month to read a play. “Henry’s lifelong expertise and keen interest and engagement in science, the arts, music, literature and the humanities in general, make him somewhat of a *Renaissance man*, a description that is currently still apt.

While Henry is planful and largely keeps to a routine of activities, he also *enjoys being open to, and embracing new experiences and living in the moment*, themes that have played out throughout his life and allow him *to experience wonderment, joy, and spontaneity*, which contribute to an exciting and vital life. Henry lives *enthusiastically* in the moment working on a chair—his newest hobby—in the woodworking shop and *figuring out* “how I’m going to turn the legs in that chair and how I’m going to bore that hole there and what sort of stain I’m going to use to finish it off and so forth.” He enjoys bird watching, another new activity in his life, and

gets caught up in the magic of the moment when he observes a seagull in flight. A large part of living in the moment and experiencing things in the moment is connected to Henry's *powers of observation and his deep respect and love of nature*, themes that have always been meaningful for him and significant in contributing to a vitally rich life. When recalling a recent birding outing to Colony Farm, Henry exuberantly relives the moments and his excitement, caught up in each and every moment.

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal and social responsibility and having an ethic of caring are lifelong themes that have contributed to Henry's being able to live a worthwhile, meaningful, satisfying, and vital life. He attributes his deep sense of social and personal responsibility and helping others *to being a Christian*. Henry is *remembered for having made a positive impact on the lives of so many people through his professionalism, caring attitude, teaching and mentoring of young people*. This *remembrance is important to Henry* and contributes to a life today that is satisfying and vital. He calls it "rather satisfying" to be in orchestra not long ago and have the new conductor recall that Henry had taught him sailing when he was a child. He also enjoys it when people, serendipitously, inform Henry that he was the doctor who helped "bring them into the world."

Closely connected to leading a worthwhile, meaningful, and vital life are themes of personal and social responsibility that have been lifelong for Henry including *taking care of, enjoying, and learning from the younger generations*. He *is generative*. Looking after younger generations has been an integral part of Henry's life and something he believed was critical in order for him to live a valued, full, and vital life. Henry has "kept in touch" with the boys he mentored over the years and he explains that he phones them during the Christmas season because he "is interested in hearing how they're getting on." Henry remarks that *being a mentor*

“was probably the best thing I did as far as volunteer work...That was great fun!” Smiling, Henry recalls a myriad of activities the young people and he participated in together including hiking, skating, swimming, playing squash, fishing and camping. Mentoring children and adolescents provided Henry with opportunities for learning by *broadening his perspective*; as he says *“I got to see things from a different point of view.”*

Although Henry no longer volunteers with children and youth, he is *still able to be generative to younger generations* and see things from a different point of view by being a caring and interested grandfather. He is able to offer his grandson a place to stay when he visits Vancouver, and although he can't physically keep up to his grandson, he can offer him transportation, if necessary. According to Henry, his life is more vital and interesting when he is able to spend time with his grandchildren because *“it's interesting that they do things at nineteen and twenty that I didn't do and they see things from a different point of view.”* Henry finds it *“great fun” to be in contact with the younger generations, because he is both learning from them and learning to understand them. Knowing and understanding how the world is different for young people today, than it was for him as a youth, is an important aspect of living a vital life for Henry.*

While *he still volunteers*, albeit not with youth, sings in the church choir, and participates in a senior's discussion group at UBC, more and more, for Henry, *taking personal responsibility is outweighing taking social responsibility*. There are quite a few ways in which Henry currently demonstrates handling his personal responsibilities. Taking the necessary steps to *maintain his physical health* is a priority for Henry and he does this by having a regular routine for keeping active. As well, Henry notes *“physically, I sleep well,”* something which he believes maintains his strength to live an energetic, satisfying and vital life. Henry also feels that he has *personal obligations* including attending orchestra and choir practice every week *that he needs to see*

through in order to be engaged in his social world. Henry believes that he has a *responsibility to be conscientious* because it is the work of practicing together that enables the orchestra and choir members to “perfect” the music and singing for the performances. *Being conscientious* contributes to Henry’s ability to live a satisfying and vital life because it *motivates and propels him to “get” things “done.”*

Henry has also *begun to take more and more responsibility at home*, which is new for him. He acknowledged that because his wife is “sick and she can’t drive anymore” he now has “to drive her around everywhere, going shopping and seeing the doctor,” and doing “the banking.” As well Henry reflects that while he enjoys seeing his children and grandchildren and that “I get invitations to go and visit them...I can’t leave my wife now. I couldn’t leave her overnight because she might fall or have trouble or something like that!” At 85 years of age, Henry is *responsible for being a caregiver to his wife* and he takes this responsibility very seriously.

Having Adequate Finances

Having adequate finances are necessary for Henry to continue to live an interesting and vital life. According to Henry, he looks after the family’s finances. While *financial security and freedom* are important to a certain extent in order for Henry to keep active and enjoy the lifestyle he experiences currently, he is clear that *being “comfortable” financially* is enough for him to be able to live a vital life at 85 years of age. Henry notes “what we’ve got now is adequate to our needs, but a dollar doesn’t buy what it used to.” So, while Henry has enough of a financial foundation to currently meet his and his wife’s needs, he is also very cognizant that inflation is also a fact of life and could impact his life negatively in the future. Henry reflects “Well I suppose it’s important to have enough, but how much is enough?” He also reflects “the more you’ve got, the more you can afford to give away.” Generally, Henry feels that he is financially

sound enough to manage the lifestyle that he lives currently, but if prices were to increase substantially or his or his wife's ability to live independently changed, things would be more difficult financially for him and that would become more responsibility for him.

Not Taking Things for Granted, Accepting Inevitable Changes and Adapting

Henry does not take his life or the things in it for granted, themes that are lifelong and continue to be important for him to live a vital life. He is *grateful for life, the life he has had in the past and the one he has now*. Currently Henry believes that he has a lot to be thankful for and reflects "every morning I get up and give thanks for another beautiful day, and I'm still alive and well and have strength." He notes "I'm lucky that we've [he and his wife] both survived this long" when he reflects on his almost 55 years of marriage. Henry is aware that, at 85 years of age, life is a gift and not to be taken for granted. He *accepts that at his age he might not even live long enough to* celebrate his 55th wedding anniversary. Henry notes "There are things, as I said, certain things you can change and chose, and other things, you just have to accept the way they are." Henry also feels fortunate to have raised four children and to have six grandchildren. Overall, Henry feels lucky to have lifelong excellent physical health, and an active and enquiring mind, and a strong spiritual foundation. This is evident when he offers some advice for people in their 50's and 60's who want to live a vital life as older adults. Overall, Henry believes *people should not take life for granted and should have a balanced mental, physical, and spiritual life*. Specifically, Henry suggests that people don't smoke, that they exercise and keep mentally and physically active and alert, that they don't drink to excess, eat moderately, read rather than watch television and learn to play games like bridge or chess or billiards.

At 85 years of age, Henry has *recognized and accepted that there are limitations involved with aging*. Besides no longer having a fulfilling career and nowhere near as satisfying a volunteer life, there are other *losses and limitations* that Henry has experienced that are

connected to aging. Henry reflects “I’m accepting the loss of little things, from time to time.” For Henry, smaller losses due to the physical realities of aging have evolved slowly, over time, so that he is able to take note of them and be *proactive in replacing activities that are dependent on having more physical strength or endurance with ones that are more doable.* Because *his strength and endurance have decreased,* Henry now hikes with “seniors” instead of adolescents and goes “more slowly.” Henry reflects that the decrease in strength was something “*I just accepted...as one of those things to do with aging and I had to go on a different track.*” By *accepting and adapting to physical limitations and losses due to aging* Henry continues to live an exciting and vital life. Some of the lifelong activities that Henry has given up more recently because of *decreasing strength and stamina* are swimming, cross-country skiing and kayaking. When he first moved to the UBC area, Henry volunteered “to work in the woods...and pull ivy.” He reflects “And I used to do that for awhile, but they haven’t called on me lately. Maybe they think I’m too old and weak too carry on.” Henry reflects “one has to accept that sort of thing really.” Henry also acknowledges “As I get older I get more tired and tend to spend the evening sitting down with a book and going to sleep.”

However, while Henry has accepted many of the limitations he has experienced due to aging in later life *he has become more selective* in the types of activities in which he participates and has *compensated for his decreasing strength, stamina and endurance* by developing “hobbies” and activities that he can do well, albeit at a slower pace. Accepting his limitations, but *replacing what he can no longer do with activities he can do or spending more time on activities that have been lifelong and are still doable,* such as hiking and cycling, ensure Henry lives a vital and interesting life currently. Being able to *be flexible and adapt to his changing circumstances* contributes greatly to Henry’s well-being and vital life. Up until approximately 18 months ago when he went to France and Spain, Henry continued to *travel, something he has*

enjoyed throughout his life and something he believes enriched his life and contributed to his life being a vital one. Travelling was an “adventure” for Henry; however, now he notes travelling “gets to be too much of a chore...what with the airports the way they are—forms to fill out and waits and all this kind of thing, and delayed flights. I’d rather stay home!” Henry has *compensated somewhat for his lack of overseas travel by “living vicariously” through the experiences of travelling of his daughter and friends, and learning about places like “Machu Pichu...in Peru...second hand.”*

Acknowledging that illness, disability and loss are possibilities and death is inevitable, but not dwelling on his own mortality, is an important aspect of Henry’s ability to continue to live a satisfying and vital life. Henry understands that life and death are inseparable. Having grown to manhood during World War II, been a family doctor and have older friends and acquaintances, Henry knows and understands only too well the reality of death and loss of physical abilities and/or mental abilities through the aging process. At this point in his life, he has already seen many of his “contemporaries” die or endure physical and/or mental losses. Henry comments “I know that sooner or later I’m going to die. I don’t know whether it will be five days or fifteen years! [pause] And one just has to accept the fact.” While Henry appears to have accepted the reality of his own mortality, it is harder for him to accept the prolonged suffering that may precede the end of his life which he has witnessed so many times in the lives of other people as they aged. Henry reflects “I hope that I remain active until that time [death] comes. I wouldn’t want to be chronically sick like I’ve seen so many people.”

Having a Sense of Personal Agency

Having a sense of personal agency including having choices, making decisions and being independent is a theme that has played out throughout Henry’s life and is currently very important in order for his life to be meaningful and satisfactory and for him *to feel he is in*

control of his life. Empowering himself by continuing to take control of his life and acknowledging that he has choices and options at the mid-point of his ninth decade, is a potent way for Henry to live a vital life.

For Henry, *sustaining an independent life* equals living a vital life. He has witnessed nursing home life and it is not something that he would ever want for himself. During the interview, Henry did reflect a lot on how he would “hate” to be in a nursing home because it would limit his control and choices and would be very uninteresting for him. His orchestra performs in a “nursing home” and Henry reflects on the monotony of being “confined to a wheel chair” and not having the freedom to “get up and walk around” and always sitting with the same people at meal time and how “very dull” a life that must be. He notes “I just hate the idea of being stuck someplace.” Henry reflects on *how difficult it would be for him to live a life without choices* because of severely debilitating illness or physical or mental disability. Henry describes the situation of an old friend, a man in his nineties, who had a stroke and “lost the use of his right hand and his speech.” This man was still “aware and alert” but he couldn’t talk and all he could do was lay in bed and “receive visitors.” Henry passionately exclaims “I would hate to be like that!..Oh, I’d hate to be like that!”

Henry notes, as long as his mind was still active, even if he was physically limited in doing certain things or was in a wheelchair, “I’d probably take up bridge or something like that.” Henry is aware that if he were to become physically incapacitated, *he still has choices and could make decisions and learn new activities* such as bridge *which would sustain his mental alertness and social involvement*. However, he says, with a smile, a chuckle and a twinkle in his eye that “at the moment it [learning bridge] doesn’t amuse me.”

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Having a close, companionable, and loving relationship with his wife, founded on almost 55 years of marriage, and having raised four children together, contributes to Henry's current ability to live a vital life. He considers it very "nice" that *he and his wife are "good friends" and companions at this stage in their life* and able to be interested in and converse about their children and grandchildren. *Having a close, caring and supportive relationship with his children and grandchildren*, contributes to a meaningful and vital life for Henry. When asked about the importance of family as a contributor to his satisfying and vital life, Henry commented that family are "very important," however he quickly noted "except that we don't see them often enough!" One son lives in Quebec, two sons live on Vancouver Island, and his daughter lives in Vancouver, but travels a great deal with her work, so "she's not home very often." Henry comments that his family comes over "occasionally" and that they are "one of our chief topics of conversation at home." While it is difficult for Henry to see his family members on a regular basis because "they're spaced all over the place," he notes that they keep connected through email and telephone conversations. After a pause Henry, somewhat sadly, reflects "you know we hardly know the grandchildren because we just haven't seen them since they've been small." His grandchildren range in age from 13 years old to early 20's and Henry notes "We saw more of them when they were tiny." Henry acknowledges that his wife and he "enjoy having their family around" when they come to Vancouver. Being with family is meaningful for Henry and something his wife and he "chiefly think about and plan for together." Henry "likes to know what the grandchildren are up to" and he delights in knowing about and discussing what they are studying and planning on doing career-wise.

Having a satisfying social life is also an important theme in Henry's narration of living a vital life. According to Henry he was continually meeting people when he was working and had

four children living at home. He reflects “But now there’s just the two of us.” *Recognizing his need to be engaged with others* Henry makes a concerted effort to connect with people who have similar interests as he does. He acknowledges that a lot of the activities that he does, such as hiking and woodworking, “become social.” Not only does he look forward to these activities because he enjoys doing them, but also because he gets to discuss aspects of each activity with the other participants, some of whom he has known for a while, and others whom he is just getting to know. *Engaging with others who are involved in the activities that he enjoys doing, discussing things with them, and at times, just “nattering” away with others*, enlivens and revitalizes Henry’s life. He reflects that having a social life “gets me talking.” Henry understands that isolating himself would be very detrimental to his ability to live a meaningful and vital life.

Having both longer term friendships and developing new acquaintances and friendships are extremely important in order for Henry to maintain an interesting and vital life. Henry has long term friends, one with whom he travelled with, and others with whom he makes music. However, a number of his older friends have died or find it harder to get out and about so Henry is very aware that in order for him *to continue to have a meaningful social life, he needs to meet new people and develop new acquaintances and friendships*. Thus, he has taken up the new activities of woodworking and bird watching. He notes that through woodworking “I’m getting to know some interesting people.” Henry is also *someone who listens to others and learns from them*, a lifelong ability that ensures that he is connecting with other people something that is critical for him to continue to live a vital life.

Carrying on and Coping with Life’s Challenges

Another theme that has played out in Henry’s life and continues to play out is his *ability to ‘carry on’ and see things through in the face of life’s challenges*. Retiring from the practice of family medicine and volunteering with adolescents was a huge challenge for Henry because he

was no longer feeling and/or receiving the validation that he was living a worthwhile life. But Henry carried on and to a large degree, has reinvented his life by “keeping busy” in a different capacity. He is *hopeful for the future and optimistic* about his ability to carry on and live fully and vitally. Currently he is actively involved in numerous diverse and interesting endeavours ranging from the physical, to the musical, to the theatrical, to the creative, to the practical, to the cognitive. *As well as carrying on*, another way Henry faces and copes with challenges that currently come up for him is to *acknowledge that “there are always challenges,” throughout life*. He says “I feel that God put me into the world and I’m thankful for it.” *Henry’s deep spirituality and Christianity* are lifelong themes that are comforting, sustain his well-being and provide him with a strong foundation to cope with the more daunting challenges he faces as he ages.

Having good health and taking care of his health, and being fit and active are themes that continue to resonate currently in Henry’s life and have been critical in his ability to cope with and overcome many challenges, especially as he ages. “I’m healthy,” states Henry. Henry reflects that good health encompasses both mental and physical abilities and he comments “my mind is active...and also, physically, I don’t have arthritis and anything like that that prevents me playing or walking or climbing.” Henry reports having no medical conditions except he is “developing cataracts” and he’s “going to have to get something done about that sooner or later.” As well he notes that he takes no prescription medications. Being physically able is important to Henry as he faces the *challenges inherent in getting places* as he ages. Going to see his dentist in New Westminster, BC is made more complicated because he doesn’t like to drive a car. Out of three options open to him to get to his dentist he chose to cycle “down to the bus depot, put the bike on the bus” and then “went to the sky train and put the bike on the sky train” and then “had about twenty minutes to cycle to get to the dentist’s office.” Henry also considers himself to be

psychologically healthy, another theme that has played out throughout his life and allows him to cope well with the challenges he faces today. “I don’t get depressed or unduly elated! And [laughing] I’m not yet demented. Maybe one day I will be! [laughing]

At 85 years of age the challenges that Henry faces are both different and the same as he has faced throughout his life. More so than when he was younger, Henry currently *has to work things out*, such as transportation, *ahead of time. Planning, problem-solving, and thinking things out ahead of time are themes that have resonated throughout Henry’s life* and help him face and deal with challenges before they become overwhelming for him. He reflects that he plans a week ahead, but always is ready to change the plan if necessary. For instance, if he can’t hike or cycle because it is raining, he will go to the woodwork shop or to the library. *Being flexible and open to changing his plans*, is another way that Henry copes with unexpected challenges. He reflects on the *importance of making sure that he has more than one plan available to him* if plan A doesn’t work out. Having a plan B and a plan C ensures that Henry can still keep busy and enjoy an activity and this helps him not feel disappointed if something he was planning and counting on isn’t possible to do. *Taking more time to think things through* also contributes to Henry’s well-being and vital living because it means that Henry is “*in control...of his activities.*”

Taking *initiative and being proactive* are lifelong themes that have a great deal of importance for Henry as an older adult and are ways he copes with the challenges inherent in older age, specifically the tendency to self-isolate, something that Henry is aware of and has no intention of doing. While *his continued initiative taking is evident by his involvement in many activities, it is also evident in his desire to make things happen by being the one to keep in touch with people who share his interests and encourage them to remain involved with him.*

Having a sense of humour and being able not to take himself too seriously are themes that are lifelong and help Henry cope with significant life issues, contributing to his current

ability to live a vital life. Henry notes “I usually see the funny side of things.” Throughout the interview, Henry revealed a gentle and abiding humour, usually directed at himself. This ability to see humour in life is especially important for Henry now as he deals with the loss of good friends, his decreasing strength, his slowing down, and his wife needing more caregiving from him. Having the ability to not take himself too seriously has also helped him immensely in coping with the challenge of what he considers the less worthwhile life he is living currently. Henry recalls that his father “had a similar sense of humour so I probably got it off of him.” Being able to laugh at himself is very significant and important for Henry because he believes, and he chuckles as he says this, “people who can’t laugh at themselves really seem rather dignified old fools in a way, don’t they.” There is one potentially enormous challenge to Henry’s ability to live a satisfying and vital life that is troubling for him and that he does not see any humour in. He worries and is “always afraid” about his quality of life if he or his wife became physically and/or mentally disabled, because they could not afford to pay for an expensive care home.

Having Good Memories and Reliving Meaningful Experiences

Having good memories that enable Henry to relive meaningful and valued experiences are important and contribute greatly to his vital and satisfying life. Henry’s memories of being vitally engaged in nature continue to enrich his life today. Henry recalls a wonderful memory of “canoeing down the Harrison River.” In his words:

The river divides up into little streams, and I went down one stream and there was a gravel bar, and on the gravel bar was a dead salmon, and on the dead salmon was a bald eagle. And it was sort of looking defiantly at me. And there were a couple of seagulls, keeping a safe distance, hoping for little bits. And my kayak went past and I thought, “that was great!” [chuckling] A great experience!

Henry has led such an interesting and vital life and been involved in so many diverse activities that he was passionate about that he now has a rich store of memories upon which he can draw. And these memories help sustain his vital life. When Henry reflected further on the memory of canoeing down the Harrison River he said “I can see it again in my mind’s eye!”

Henry also explains that the memories of music and poetry are also important for him and are also in his “mind’s eye.” His memories are vividly alive within him. He explains how the music he has heard and played over his lifetime continues to play in his head noting “There are always tunes in my head...I can still hear some of the, the great pieces of music that I once heard.” Henry eloquently recites some lines from William Wordsworth’s poem, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. He describes how Wordsworth “can still see the daffodils waving in the breeze” and says “I’m the same way.” Then Henry recites the following lines of Wordsworth’s poetry:

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream

the earth and every common sight

To me did seem apparelled in celestial light

the glory and the freshness of a dream

It is not now as it hath been of yore

Turn wheresoere I may by night or day

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

Henry identifies with Wordsworth and acknowledges that at the mid-point of his ninth decade “there is a sort of fading of that part of life.” For Henry, living life currently is not often as exciting or as glorious or as vibrant as it once was; however, the memories he has of things he loved and experienced and felt passion for live on within him and “still make him get up and dance.”

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

When Henry was asked for a metaphor to describe living vitally in later life, he paused for a while and then, referring to an old saying, said, “*If you don’t use it, you lose it.*” Henry explains:

“I always say to these hikers, if I were to have to go to bed for three months with pneumonia or something, that I probably would not be able to hike like I can now. If

I didn’t practice [the cello] every day, I shouldn’t be able to keep up with my playing.

In order to live a vital life at 85 years of age, Henry is certainly “using it” by engaging in his activities every day and practicing his music every day. Henry believes in “possibilities” reflecting “*there are always possibilities.*” By this he means that “there are things he’s never done and could do.” Henry’s belief in possibilities not only gives him something to look forward to, but also ensures that there is *hope in his life, which is both life affirming and cause for optimism*. Henry continues to be *hopeful for the future, and lives his life with optimism* recognizing that a life still offering him possibilities is a life worth living. Currently Henry is thinking about doing something he has never done before because he had no time, and that is “getting a computer and learning how to use it.”

Tangible Representation for Living Vitally

Henry chose to have a photograph taken of him holding his cello as the tangible representation of living a vital life at the age of 85 years. *Playing the cello has been his lifelong “chief hobby,” in fact, his “only hobby”* when he was working, and it represents currently living a life that can still be exciting, at times, and vital. Henry acknowledges “Yes, there’s something different about music. It’s more exciting than unmusical things!” Experiencing such musical excitement is both energizing and satisfying for Henry.

Margarita: Laughing, Exploring, Listening, Remaining Young at Heart and Mind

Margarita is a 77 year old divorced retired executive assistant who was born in Trinidad and immigrated to Canada in 1968. Margarita's narration of her experiences of being vitally engaged in living as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play themselves out in her current life as well as newer themes that have evolved in her 60's and 70's. After being asked the questions: **"How are you living a vital life?"** and **"What does living a vital life mean to you?"** Margarita initially showed some nervousness, questioned me to make sure that she understood the questions correctly, and then relaxed into her story, reflecting on it and narrating it with warmth and humour.

Lifelong Learning, Education and Career

Lifelong learning and education, whether formal or informal, are important lifelong themes that have contributed a lot to Margarita's ability to continue to live a meaningful, reflective, and vital life. Driving her interest in learning is a sense of curiosity about the world and its people, past and present. Margarita is the eldest of six children, four girls and two boys. She reflects that her mother was very "strict," and that her parents "never really sat down with children and talked about life." However Margarita considers her parents to have been "good people" who taught their children by example. Margarita graduated from grade 12 in Trinidad with a "Cambridge certificate and then went to Pitman's College for secretarial training." She left the family home and married at age 23 years. In 1968, at 35 years of age, Margarita divorced her husband (he has since died) and moved to Toronto, Canada.

Margarita views education and learning on a much broader scale than just formal schooling. For example, moving to Canada was a tremendous education for her. She reflects "I had to learn a Hell of a lot!" Margarita stayed with friends in Toronto and went to job interviews. She had to learn how to take trains and use the subway. When she got a job she found a place of

her own to live. Looking back and reflecting on immigrating and starting a new life in a new country as a single woman Margarita comments “in those days it never even scared me cause I had all those things to do.” However she views her current situation very differently saying “But now I’d be scared stiff to have to start my life all over somewhere by myself.” When Margarita moved to Vancouver in 1970 she continued her career as a secretary and later an executive assistant until she reached mandatory retirement age at 65 years.

Interwoven with learning is *maintaining mental acuity* which has always been a significant way in which Margarita lives a satisfactory and vital life. Margarita reflects that she tries to “stimulate” her brain. “I would take evening courses on different subjects” she says. She participated in lectures at Capilano University and the Lucas Center, especially after she retired. Margarita currently reads newspapers to keep learning and watches public television. *Keeping her mind stimulated by keeping connected to current events* is an important way that she continues to keep learning and maintaining her vital life. Margarita also recognizes how much she learns from travelling, playing sports, and being with other people and how all these things have always contributed to her happiness, sense of well-being and are directly related to her vital lifestyle.

Keeping Busy and Involved by Having, Developing, and Pursuing Interests

Keeping busy and involved by having, developing and pursuing interests is a huge part of what Margarita does “to achieve a vital life.” *Along with good health* she believes that keeping active regardless of what she does is the most crucial way that she maintains her vital life. “I think keeping active keeps you young—at heart and mind” Margarita reflects. *Feeling and thinking young* bolsters Margarita’s energy level and happiness and ignites her vitality. She considers herself to be a very active person. She does some activity, usually with others, every day. She notes “I try to keep busy! I am bored if I have nothing to do, so I keep—I’ve always

had a busy life, regardless of if I was married or working with a small income.” It is a *priority* for Margarita *to keep her “body busy” through involvement in outdoor/indoor activities and the gym*. She recognizes the importance of keeping fit and “strengthening” her bones. Without partaking in and enjoying her activities, Margarita laughingly reflects “I think I’d be bored stiff and go crazy.” *Participating in an activity she enjoys every day* keeps her interested and engaged in living a vital life. When she was younger Margarita skied and bicycled. Currently she continues to play tennis, something she started doing around 1960. Throughout her life she has walked and this is something she continues to do presently. She is a lifelong traveller. As much as she can afford to she enjoys attending movies and theatrical and musical performances.

Having a keen interest and curiosity about the world and life both close and far away keeps Margarita’s mind young which sustains her current vital lifestyle. She acknowledges that she doesn’t always understand “everything” about politics but to the best of her ability she follows politics. Margarita *welcomes interests such as politics that are challenging and more difficult for her and she attends to them with her best effort*. She has a lot of determination. *She doesn’t back down from doing most things that are difficult; she perseveres and sees things through*. She listens to the news and calls herself “a news junkie.” *Through seeking to understand politics and being avidly engaged in following current events* Margarita describes how she *tries to make meaning of what is happening in the world*. She reflects “I have to listen and try to understand what’s going on in the world all around me” and “I have to be *interested in what’s going on*.” Margarita then explains how she makes meaning of knowing others on a deeper level when she notes that she “is interested in people she works with, her friends—how they think!” She believes real understanding comes from asking her friends “their point of view about something” and not thinking “she knows it all.” *Listening to and being interested in others, showing humility, being open to other people’s experiences, trying to understand what is*

happening worldwide, and broadening her perspectives on life are important ways Margarita learns about others and understands herself in relation to others. *Understanding, especially self-understanding*, helps ensure Margarita's life is a rich, meaningful, and vital one.

Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life

Believing that she is living a purposeful and worthwhile life drives Margarita's desire to continue living and is critical for her life to be meaningful and vital. In her words, "If I didn't live a worthwhile life, what's the purpose of living?..I think that we all have to feel that life is worthwhile. And if we don't, well why are we here?" Ultimately Margarita believes that living a vital life means in some part of her "*not wishing to die.*" *Wanting to get up each morning, looking forward to life, and living each and every day to the best of her ability in the moment* provides Margarita with a meaningful purpose which in turn feeds her enthusiasm for vital living. *Looking forward to life* is a continuing theme for Margarita. *Having goals and/or dreams ensure that she looks forward to every day optimistically.* She reflects "I suppose without a dream for something life could be quite empty." *Having a dream* makes Margarita's life fuller and *inspires her youthful heart* which sustains her very vital life.

When she was younger *her purpose in life was to travel* which she did. Her first trip away from Trinidad was in 1966 when she went with a friend to England for three months. She realized that she "wanted to live overseas" after divorcing her husband. She believes that coming to Canada was "sort of a purpose" because *she "wanted to explore other parts of the world."* Margarita accomplished this *desire for adventure and exploring* by either travelling to far off destinations or, as in the case of Canada, living here and experiencing "four distinct seasons of the year."

According to Margarita the major way in which *she creates happiness in her life is through planning.* Planning has always been an important factor in Margarita's ability to create

and sustain a full, purposeful and vital life. She “hopes” what she plans for will make her “happy” noting “*And to me life is all about being happy!*” Being happy is a huge contributor to Margarita’s sense of living a worthwhile and vital life. She reflects “it’s the happiness that influences the vital life!” Margarita explains “if I’m happy it means that I want to do things, I want to continue living, I want to make plans, I want to travel if I can...” *Being contented* is also a critical component of Margarita’s ability to live a life she feels is worthwhile and vital. For Margarita contentment means her life is “comfortable.” According to Margarita *being comfortable* encompasses having a life that includes having adequate financial funds, a nice place to live, few regrets, family, and friends. Connected to happiness and contentment is Margarita’s perception that she is “a fun person.” *Being born with a happy nature and enjoying having fun* have contributed considerably to her vital life in the past and the present.

Margarita feels it is “a blessing” that she can *make people laugh* and thinks she’s lucky that it is “*her nature*” to love to laugh.” *Having a wonderful sense of humour, being able to laugh at herself and others* is “a hundred percent” significant for Margarita to live energetically, meaningfully, and hopefully and look forward to things and feel her life is worthwhile. She “loves to laugh” and grew up in a family that loved to laugh. Laughter is so important to Margarita’s vital life because after she laughs she feels better and when she makes someone else laugh she reflects “I laugh all over again! And I feel good!” *Making someone else laugh, lifting their spirits by “making them feel good”* increases Margarita’s image of herself as someone who helps others which contributes to her well-being. She notes that on her tombstone her friends and family will write “I always made them laugh” and feels comforted to know she will be remembered for her “infectious laugh.” *Laughter is a powerful way in which Margarita ensures that both her emotional and physical health is nurtured* which in turn fuels her vital lifestyle.

Wanting to be *happy motivates Margarita to make plans* something that is closely connected to *having a routine* which contributes a lot to her ability to currently live a purposeful and vital life. When she worked she had a routine of “getting up every day at a certain time, and going to work, and to know what I was doing from Monday to Friday.” Margarita recognizes that after retiring, *she had to adjust or adapt to a different routine* which she “just sort of moved into gradually.” She laughingly notes that if she didn’t have a daily routine “I would just stay at home and rot!” *Planning and having a daily routine motivate Margarita to get out and be a part of the world.* She would advise people in their 50’s to have a vision for their lives, “to plan their life—what they’re going to do when they get older” if they want to have a vital life in their 70’s and 80’s. She adds “you have to *plan your life as if you’re going to continue to be young.*”

Margarita’s plans have changed a lot in scope as she has gotten older. She notes “when I was young, I could make more plans” and they could be more extensive. Currently she has to take into account how far she can travel without becoming too tired and notes “I wouldn’t go on a trip to Australia!” Margarita reflects:

I can still make plans, like what an annual vacation will be if I will go, or if I just get fed up of airports and don’t go. I mean, I think I will always make some sort of plan in my life! Every day I make a plan! What am I going to do today? What am I going to do tomorrow?

Margarita understands and accepts that while she can still plan a lot of things *she also has “to be realistic and realize that she can’t plan everything...” More and more she balances making larger plans with making smaller plans with just “waiting for things to happen.”*

Having a Sense of Personal Agency

Being able to have choices and make decisions have always been important for Margarita and have contributed to her ability to live a meaningful, purposeful, happy, worthwhile, and vital

life. Margarita notes “I am glad that I have the choice of making choices.” She reflects further that while its “good” for her to make choices she also has to be willing to “live by the choices” she makes. For example, because she only travels once a year now she has to choose one destination out of many that she will go to and in choosing to go to, for example, “New York” she will have to forego other things that she would want to spend her money on. Margarita feels excited when she makes choices and notes “I feel proud of myself that I can make these choices!” The excitement that Margarita feels making choices and the pride it brings her knowing that she has *control over the choices she makes* is very empowering for her because *she is in the driver’s seat on her life’s journey. Steering her own destiny by making choices* is meaningful because it makes her happy and *when she is happy she is living a vital life.*

Being proactive and believing that she is ultimately the creator of her rich, meaningful, and active life is extremely empowering and has contributed greatly to Margarita’s ability to live a vital life in the past as well as currently. She makes “a conscious effort” to “*bring vitality into her life*” every day. According to Margarita the alternative is to be “a shut-in and lonely and miserable” and she adamantly refuses to be any of those things. She concedes that “some people are just lucky...And a vital life would just happen, without any effort from that person.” However she accepts that she *has always had to work at making her life a vital one*, and in so doing *maintains good emotional and mental health* which she perceives to be essential for vital living. “I think it’s up to us...We make our own lives.”

Having more balance in her life is a theme that has evolved in Margarita’s eighth decade of life and is important for her to feel a sense of agency which contributes a lot to her ability to live vitally. Margarita has learned *to balance being kind with being more selective*, a skill that has been very empowering and keeps her energy flowing. *Being a kind person* is something that Margarita values, has tried to be throughout her life, and makes her feel that her life is “good,”

meaningful and worthwhile. She notes “I’d like to be remembered as a kind person” and feels that she could be “a much kinder person” if she didn’t let her “impatience” sometimes get in the way of her kindness. Margarita thinks that *becoming more impatient* “is something that *happened with age.*” Upon a lot of reflection she concludes that she is more aware she is “less patient or less tolerant” than when she was younger because she has learned to *listen to her impatience* a factor that has enhanced her sense of personal agency. She has discovered that when she is intolerant or impatient it is because someone or something “annoys” her. At age 77 years Margarita no longer wants to be impatient or “unkind” to anyone so if she finds her intolerance level rising she will “sort of pull back” and *be more selective about whom she chooses to socialize with.* Being more selective has empowered Margarita to deal positively with her tendency to be intolerant so that she isn’t affected “personally” and doesn’t become “disappointed” in herself or “depressed.” She ended her relationship with her last boyfriend because she didn’t like herself when she was with him because she was always complaining. In order to have a happy, worthwhile, and vital life currently Margarita has learned to *recognize and trust that negative feelings she is having may indicate she needs to be more discerning with people and these negative feelings need to be dealt with quickly.* This awareness has been empowering and invigorating. In her 70’s Margarita believes that she has also become more proactive about *finding a balance between playing the “social butterfly” role and taking more time to be alone to relax and reflect.* At age 77 years *this balance between social connection and time to self* is important as it contributes to Margarita’s ability to restore her energy so she can continue to live vitally.

Standing up for herself and trying something else when what she is doing is “obviously not working” are critical ways Margarita has learned to cope over her lifetime to create and maintain an emotionally healthy, empowered and vital life. “I do not really like confrontation”

she exclaims. She adds “I will confront somebody after thinking about whatever it is for a long, long time. And if I confront them and there’s no change, then I back off.” Margarita does stand up for herself but more and more *she puts greater thought into what she will say and acts more diplomatically*. *Being diplomatic* is an empowering skill that Margarita has learned in older adulthood and is something that is necessary for peace of mind which contributes to vital living.

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Having satisfying relationships are very important for Margarita and essential in order for her to have a vital life. Margarita “needs” to be with other people. She adamantly declares “I’m not a loner! I like to share...That’s my nature!” Margarita derives a lot of strength for *living vitally from her nature*. She doesn’t enjoy being alone and *finds purpose and meaning in her life when she “connects” with others*. Connection with other people “helps” Margarita “want to have a fulfilled life, to live life fully!” *Connecting and sharing with others* is critical for her to live a vital life. She notes “I suppose [sharing] makes my life vital...It makes my life worthwhile.” Margarita laughingly reflects “Without that [sharing/connection] I’d just be a sad person...” *Reaching out to others, connecting with them and sharing herself* is crucial to Margarita’s sense of well-being which is a key component of her ability to live a full and vital life.

Having a sharing, close and loving relationship with her family is a significant aspect of Margarita’s ability to continue to live vitally. Although her siblings are not close geographically they keep in regular contact. They “chat” on the phone often and visit each other yearly. Margarita sighs when she reflects on *how critical it is for her to “have sisters to share my life with right now.”* *Sharing memories* is very meaningful and significant for Margarita’s perception of living fully and vitally. At 77 years of age it is important for her to be able to “reminisce” with her siblings “about when we were young.” “*So that is why family is important*, for reminiscing” reflects Margarita. She notes “And we laugh a lot. We remember things that happened in our

childhood and we laugh.” *Being able to “laugh”* with her sisters contributes to Margarita’s well-being and vital life. Because her siblings do not live in the same province as she does, Margarita doesn’t necessarily feel that she receives a lot of “support” from them. According to Margarita *receiving support is “where friends come in.”*

Close engagement with friends and their support contributes hugely to the vital life Margarita is currently living. She comments that her friends and family tell her that she is an “outgoing” person. She reflects “socializing is enjoyable...*socializing is important!* If I never socialized, life would be really dull! [laughing] Throughout her life and continuing currently, Margarita has been *outgoing* and, in her words, “*a social butterfly*” which she describes as “liking people,” and being with people. Her friends and she reciprocate organizing special activities such as going to the theatre or concerts. She reflects “my friends are important to me.” Three years ago Margarita was hospitalized and reflects “if I didn’t have friends it would have been traumatic.” Her friends can be counted on to “support” her when she needs them. Margarita *celebrates “important occasions—birthdays, Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving”* with her friends and meets them for “coffee, lunch, dinner.” *Providing support for her friends and helping them anyway she can* is also an important aspect of Margarita’s current vital life. She notes “I like it when they confide in me or ask me my opinion.” *Reaching out and sharing with her friends* is critical for her to continue to live a vital life in older adulthood. According to Margarita reciprocity through sharing with, and supporting one another, “makes having friends a delight” and contributes a lot to her emotional well-being which in turn feeds her vitality. Margarita also acknowledges that there are times she just wants to be at home by herself. “I don’t mind doing things by myself” she reflects. For example, she enjoys going to movies by herself.

Currently Margarita is single, having been divorced shortly before she immigrated to Canada. Since her divorce she notes “I’ve had some good years with guys...But I’ve never

remarried.” Margarita “always wanted a family...a husband and children” but she reflects “that never materialized.” In the latter part of her eighth decade Margarita has *come to terms with not having a life partner* and acknowledges “I just say to myself, if it [having a life partner] will, if it happens, it happens.” According to Margarita being unmarried is not difficult because she has good friends, is close to her family and is engaged in living her life as fully as she can. Although Margarita is not currently in a romantic relationship with someone she would *be open to having a partner to share her life with.*

Margarita has always enjoyed engaging socially with the opposite sex. She “enjoys the dimension that men add” to any social gathering or activity she engages in and she feels good if men “compliment” her. According to Margarita it is important for her *to continue to be aware of and experience her sense of womanhood* and “it’s still important” for her *to feel that she is attractive.* She likes to “dress nicely” and get her “hair done.” *Feeling attractive, engaging with the opposite sex socially, and feeling good about her femininity* contribute positively to her self-image and feed her vitality. “If I look good, I feel good,” she notes. She is quick to point out that “putting on makeup” and getting her hair done” are things she does for herself, not because a man might see her. Margarita is not “brave” enough to meet someone through the internet, so she believes that if she does end up with a partner he will be someone she meets through friends or her activities.

Feeling Fortunate and Not Taking Things for Granted

Margarita has *never taken things for granted and feels very lucky and fortunate for many things in her life*, past and present. She feels very fortunate to be able to afford to live in the apartment she currently is residing in. She reflects “...if the day comes when I can’t afford this apartment, I have to downsize and then my life might not be as vital.” The amazing view she has of Burrard Inlet and Downtown Vancouver keeps her from being “bored stiff looking at another

wall!” *Living somewhere “comfortable”* is something that Margarita considers very important to her physical and mental well-being which is critical to her vitality. She reflects “if I didn’t have somewhere nice to live...poohh, life would be difficult!”

Margarita is *grateful for having had good health throughout her life* and considers it as crucial as being active in sustaining her vital life. She reflects “if I didn’t have good health, I can’t imagine what life would be like.” Currently Margarita has high blood pressure which she says is “under control” and osteopenia which she describes as being “the stage before osteoporosis.” Laughing she reflects “you start getting aches and pains all over your body” in these “golden years.” She recognizes that the time may come when she is not in “as good health” as she is *now, however she doesn’t dwell on it. She is aware of and has reflected on her own mortality but doesn’t linger on it.*

Margarita believes that one of the major reasons why some older adults are not living as vital a life as she is “is because of ill health,” both emotional and physical. In her opinion some people “suffer from depression because they don’t have any *enthusiasm for life*” and “don’t want to go out and they don’t want to make a vital life for themselves.” She is convinced that *having enthusiasm for life* is essential for a full and vital life. Margarita has always embraced life enthusiastically and continues to do so. In her opinion, “most of the time” people who tend not to be living a vital life in their 70’s have physical health ailments or diseases which may greatly restrict their ability to be vital. She cites as an example people who might have “severe arthritis” and “can’t do much walking” or are unable to “enjoy tennis” as not being able to live as vitally as she does. Margarita reflects that some people are “shut-ins” because of serious health problems such as “heart disease or cancer” and that makes it very difficult for them to live a vital life. She believes that adults in their 50’s should be *taking care of their health* and “eating well...eating healthily” if they intend to live vitally in their 70’s and 80’s.

Loss, Inevitable Changes, Acceptance and Adapting

According to Margarita she has *always lived a vital life*. However after she retired she acknowledges that her life was somewhat less vital. She notes “I slowed down.” She wishes she could still have her career because she “enjoyed working” and “being around people all day.” Retiring was not her “doing” but a result of her company’s policy of mandatory retirement at 65 years of age; it was a loss for Margarita. *Loss of her career* was initially difficult for Margarita. She responded to this loss by “planning a whole new life.” At age 77 Margarita has come to accept that “what will come, will come.” More and more as she ages, *acceptance* helps Margarita carry on with her life, not be overly disappointed if things don’t turn out the way she planned, and continue to wish for things even if her wishes don’t always “come true.” She accepts that her plans, goals, and dreams may not always work out the way she expects them too. When plans go awry *she carries on and continues to do whatever is necessary* so that her life remains vital. With regard to learning acceptance Margarita reflects “it takes awhile!” In her 70’s she is *learning to accept what she cannot change about life and other people* and to *accept the fact that she is changing and developing and growing*. *Acceptance of other people* is a theme that has evolved more recently and it goes a long way in ensuring Margarita has “peace of mind” which is very important for her to live a vital life. *Being more accepting of whatever life brings* ensures that Margarita *continues to be hopeful, look forward to things, and be happier*, all of which support her emotional health and contribute to her very vital lifestyle.

Margarita came to *accept* the reality of being retired and *adapted* to retirement by *reinventing her life quite significantly*. While she was able to continue some of the activities that she enjoyed such as playing tennis, walking, and social engagement she stopped skiing and bicycling because, in her words, “as I aged my knees started to bother me.” Margarita has been faced with some of the *physical losses and changes associated with aging* and has *adapted to a*

life which doesn't include some of the activities she used to do. Instead of travelling twice a year, she now travels only once a year. Margarita reflects "I'm more relaxed now. I still want to achieve, but not—I don't have the drive that I had when I was young!" *There appears to be more balance in Margarita's life now* than when she was younger and engaged in her career. Although *she still wants to accomplish things, she is not as intensely driven to do so as when she was younger.* This balance contributes to her currently feeling more relaxed.

Having Adequate Financial Means

Having sufficient financial security is critical for Margarita to continue to live a satisfactory and vital life. Enjoying what she perceives to be "the good things in life" are necessary for her to live contentedly and vitally. She reflects "in order to live a vital life you have to spend money on a daily basis." Margarita describes the importance of having adequate finances in the following way:

...you have to be able to rent a decent apartment. You have to be able, in my case to own a car, to eat healthily...all of that finances affect. And of course being able to travel! So finances are very important!

Margarita receives a company pension which supplements her government pensions and recognizes that without them she "wouldn't be doing a lot of the things" that she enjoys. She notes that without her company pension "I definitely wouldn't be living a vital life!" Without adequate finances Margarita's ability to continue to live as vital a life as she does would be seriously compromised. "Finances affect my life tremendously" Margarita states and she describes the ways in which *having less financial security now* than when she was working has already impacted her life. Her friends and she no longer exchange gifts with one another. They go out for lunch instead of dinner "because lunch is cheaper." Margarita currently *has to think about what she wants to buy and ask herself if she really needs it.* She no longer goes out for

“dinners at upscale restaurants” instead going to “average” ones. Since retiring *she has “had to cut back”* including not going to “all the concerts and entertainment shows” as well as not taking courses at the Lucas Center, activities she used to do on a regular basis.

Margarita has learned how to *adapt to not having the same financial resources she had when she was working*. She reflects “I have to live within my means now, whereas before I retired I figured “well, I’m going to get a salary next month so I will blow \$150 on Michael Buble.” In older adulthood Margarita has *learned that she has to be “more in control” of her finances* in order to sustain a lifestyle that still guarantees that she can continue to enjoy some of the activities and events that she loves and that inspire her. She acknowledges that she was “always in control” of her finances but now she is “earning less” and has to be even more careful how she spends her money. “*I just adjust to the money*” she comments. With pride Margarita notes she doesn’t “owe anybody money” and she “pays off” her bills on time. She reflects “I’m at peace where finances are concerned.” *Having peace of mind financially* frees her from worrying about owing money and “being in debt” which contributes a lot to her continuing to have a vital life. Margarita understands the importance of *being selective when it comes to what she does and does not spend her money on*. In order to live in an apartment with a view which she believes is very important to her emotional well-being and vital lifestyle she has chosen to give up a lot of other things aforementioned that she enjoys. Margarita would advise people in their 50’s to plan their “financial future” if they intend to live vitally in their “golden years.”

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

“I’ve always been responsible for myself” notes Margarita. *Taking personal responsibility* has always been an immense part of Margarita’s life. She credits being the oldest sibling as pivotal in forming her responsible nature. Margarita reflects “I can’t tell you what it would be otherwise...I’ve never had a husband who could support me.” She views herself as

being responsible for her own life since she married. She has always been “independent” and *continues currently to live a very independent life*. For Margarita to move to Canada, decide whether or not to change jobs, and make many decisions required tremendous responsibility. After reflecting a lot she comments “responsibility...it is part of a vital life...because you feel gratified...in spite of having to make all these decisions.” However, during the interview Margarita reveals that *she “sometimes” wishes she didn’t have to be so responsible and so independent*. She says that *she would “like to share” her responsibility* with someone and that this sharing would contribute to her life being even more vital. Currently she feels “tired” of being one-hundred percent responsible for her life, but, overall, she acknowledges that *being responsible and independent is important* and has contributed to her being able to live vitally in the past and in the present.

Social responsibility is something that Margarita assumed through volunteering with seniors when she was in her 40’s. She visited with seniors who needed someone to “come and talk with them and listen to them and take them out in their wheelchair for a spin on the weekend. As well she has done volunteer work with Harvest House. Margarita says she does not volunteer currently because she hasn’t decided which organization she wants to volunteer for.

Carrying on and Coping with Life’s Challenges

Carrying on and coping with life’s challenges are lifelong themes that contribute to Margarita’s ability to continue to live a happy, content and vital life. *Believing in God and having faith* are important ways that sustain her ability to carry on and cope with the challenges inherent in living a long life. Margarita explains that *her belief in God and prayer* help her to face challenges that might disrupt her vital life. She derives some strength for living vitally from her faith, although she reflects “I have my doubts about religion, about whether there’s a hereafter.” She questions religion rather than “having a blind faith.” Margarita definitely doesn’t

“depend on” her religion for vital living but does find it comforting. Margarita is a person who *does not give up; she is determined to always keep trying when challenges arise.*

Having courage is a theme that has played out throughout Margarita’s life. Leaving Trinidad and moving to Canada took a lot of *courage, belief in herself, and risk-taking*, qualities that have always served Margarita well. At 77 years of age Margarita’s *sense of adventure and risk-taking* are still important for her life learning and play contributing roles in maintaining her vital life, however currently she is *more cautious about what she challenges herself to do* than when she was in her 30’s.

In a poignant moment of self-honesty Margarita reflects “I can go through a period where I don’t want to continue! I might have three days...of feeling miserable and depressed.” She copes with feeling blue by following advice she read many years ago: to “only allow” herself “three or four days to feel that way and then get up and move on.” *She practices self-talk*; for example she will say “time to get up Margarita” and then she will either “look at some comedies on television or go to a funny play or reach out to friends and do something with them.

According to Margarita she has “always” coped noting that she was provided opportunities early on in her life to learn coping skills because she was the eldest of six children. After her divorce Margarita learned how to cope as a single woman. She reflects “Even if I’m in a relationship or not in a relationship I’m still coping to a certain degree. Because nothing has ever really come to me.” Reflecting further she says “if I don’t know how to cope, what would happen to me?”

Learning to cope from a young age appears to have imbued in Margarita the *strength to confront her fears and take the necessary action* when she has faced some significant challenges throughout her life. She believes that *the ability to cope has always been part of her nature.* Currently Margarita is aware that no matter how good her current coping skills are, she can never be certain that she will be able to handle potential significant health challenges as she ages.

While Margarita doesn't feel that she has any "major" challenges in her life, she admits to some "big" ones. Breaking up with a romantic partner has, at times, been a big challenge for Margarita because she reflects "I feel depressed and miserable for awhile." However, she has always been able "to move on." She thinks that *the biggest challenge to her vital life currently would be if she were to get really ill.* "That would be a challenge to survive" she states. Three years ago she ended up in the hospital with pneumonia and that was a challenge for her, because she reflects "it took me three months to recover." She credits "friends and family" with pulling together and seeing her through this challenging time. However Margarita thinks that if something happened to her that affected her ability to "get around" and be engaged with others her vital living would "definitely" be affected and that would be a major challenge.

Metaphor For Living a Vital Life

Margarita notes "*good health allows me to participate in the activities that I enjoy*" which feeds her keen sense of vitality. She chose as her metaphor to symbolize living vitally in later life "health." She reflects "in later years, the word health comes to me. Health is important! *If I wasn't healthy I don't think I would have a vital life.*" Margarita is aware that not everyone her age is as fortunate to have the good health she has and notes "I wouldn't like to be in their situation."

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

Having something she is passionate about is a key factor that nurtures Margarita's vitality. Playing tennis is her "passion." Margarita chose a photograph of holding a tennis racquet as the tangible representation of her current vital life. As she describes the evolving of her *passion for tennis* her enthusiasm is evident. Margarita reflects on how when she moved to Vancouver she didn't know anyone who played tennis. She says she "joined the tennis club in West Vancouver that has a bubble" so she could play all year. Margarita reflects "So I really

love it now, more than before because I can play all year!...And I like the people I play tennis with. So it brings me a lot of joy!” According to Margarita she has to do things that make her happy and a large part of her being happy involves playing tennis. Being happy, joyful and connected with people she likes through her passion for tennis contributes greatly to Margarita’s vital life.

Helen: “A Bit of a Rebel” With a Cause, Reaching Out and Living Life Joyfully

Helen is a 72 year old retired nurse, wife of B. for 44 years, mother of a son and two daughters aged 38 years to 42 years, and grandmother of four. Helen’s narration of her experiences of being vitally engaged in living as an older adult contain lifelong themes that continue to play out in her current life, as well as a few new themes that have more recently evolved. After being asked the questions: “**How are you living a vital life?**” and “**What does living a vital life mean to you?**” Helen, without hesitation, and with the calm conviction of a woman who has reflected deeply on her life and what is meaningful to her, began to tell her story of living a vital life. Well into the interview she comments, “I’m just wondering the real meaning of “vital”—that one word!” Upon reflection Helen decides “*I guess it [vital] means, a vitality. It’s an exuberance! There’s a joy! There’s a living. There’s a positive.*” She notes that “*the older I get, the more I am*” living an exuberant, energetic, joyful, and positive life—a vital life. The dynamic interweaving of all these qualities resonated within Helen throughout the entire interview.

Carrying On, Coping With Life’s Challenges, and Climbing Over the Hurdles

“*Life hasn’t been easy all the time, but I’ve managed to climb over the hurdles*, so to speak,” reflects Helen. “*Climbing over the hurdles*” has been a theme throughout her life and an important way that Helen has always dealt with life’s challenges—a way that supports her to continue to currently carry on living a vital life. Helen stated that over her lifetime she hasn’t had

“a lot” of challenges, however the challenges she has had appear to have been significant ones. Overall, *having religious faith* is a critical source for Helen to draw strength for carrying on and coping with life challenges. *Carrying on and coping with life’s challenges* are themes that have their beginnings in Helen’s childhood and continue to play out in her life today. She narrates a moving story of her experiences growing up in England, the youngest of five children (three girls and two boys), with an “absolutely brilliant” father who was “a first World War victim.” Very early on in her life, Helen was exposed to her father living with what today she believes would be a diagnosis of untreated PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). According to Helen, the entire family, including her mother, “all sort of pussy-footed around dad” after Helen’s mother was told by doctors “never to cross him!” As a result Helen faced some significant challenges growing up including: keeping quiet; not disturbing her father; not receiving a lot of affection from her father; and having, at a young age, *a lot of responsibility* for helping to keep the farm running.

Helen’s father was a banker, but after returning from the war, Helen laughingly comments “he was told to have an outdoor life so we went farming and he hadn’t a clue on farming. *So we were left to do it all.*” Helen says she grew up in “a calm sort of household and notes that to this day she “can’t abide” the “reactive” behaviour of some intolerant people. As a result of being the youngest of five children and always wearing “everybody’s clothes,” being “teased” by her oldest brother, whom she “absolutely adores,” and living with a father with a mental disorder, Helen reflects “*I am pretty tolerant.*”

Being a tolerant person helps Helen *communicate with people* and *respond rather than react to challenging situations*, a way of coping that is important in ensuring she has the emotional energy to live a vital life. *Having good communication skills* is one significant way that Helen deals with certain difficult or problematic situations or issues. Tied closely to *being*

tolerant and having good communication skills is Helen's ability to *reflect on things* and *not become angry in difficult situations*. According to Helen, taking the time to reflect on issues or problems ensures that any angry feelings she might have don't build up which helps sustain her ability to "just feel good" and stops her from having "to worry ahead of time." For Helen, being tolerant and reflective means that she "*avoids the negatives and lives life positively and joyfully...endeavouring not to criticize people*" powerful aids for coping, carrying on with her life and sustaining her vitality. Having *always viewed herself as a positive and optimistic person* supports Helen's well-being and ability to live a vital life.

At a young age Helen *developed a strong work ethic, giving her best effort and self-discipline* through doing chores and being responsible for actively helping to run the family farm. She openly reflects on a difficult and rather Spartan childhood and notes "I never went on holidays, I grew up and didn't go on holidays or out for dinners or anything like that until I was much older." She says, "My childhood wasn't happy per se. It was darn hard!" She concludes that her siblings and she "had nothing." *Working hard and being active and self-disciplined are themes that continued to evolve throughout her training and career as a nurse* and help fuel her present vital life. Looking back on her childhood and nursing training in England Helen says she "was very glad" for her "very, very strict upbringing" and training because *not only was she trained to work hard and do a good job, but "I think it gave me a good background to know right from wrong."* Knowing "*right from wrong*" is a lifetime value that Helen has strived to live her life by, leaving her to feel that she always does her best for herself and all others she comes in contact with. This is essential for her to be able to *have peace of mind* which is invaluable to her when coping with life's challenges, and helps her to live a contented and vital life currently.

Helen shared that, in the past, raising children was "always a challenge." Currently she is coping with two very challenging personal situations. One challenge is what Helen believes is

her husband's lack of good health practice. She notes he "had a heart attack nine years ago," is overweight, but "just loves food." She states, "Naught I can do about it." She understands that she can't change her husband, but, *ever indomitable*, Helen is working through this challenge in a number of ways. She notes "I've just blocked it! Literally. I have to! Cause I can't nag him; it doesn't do any good." However, she is being *proactive and actively changing that which is in her control*. According to Helen, they "exercise together" two or three times a week. As well, she now notes that she cooks every other day and laughingly says "He [her husband] doesn't necessarily like what I cook, but it's healthy." Helen considers herself to have a "*placid*" nature which she perceives as contributing to her ability to now accept what life throws at her and to determine what can be changed and what cannot be changed. *Not stressing or worrying about what she considers to be "insignificant" things* means she has more physical and emotional energy to live what she perceives as being an "uninhibited," interesting, fulfilling and vital life. Generally, Helen *feels "comfortable"* and "*at ease*" and *doesn't tend to "fuss"* over things. Upon deeper reflection Helen says "*I'm content within myself*," a quality that ensures Helen *cope[s] with life's problems from a very strong and grounded place, with few regrets and enough energy to think things through and make well-informed decisions* which is important for her to live a vital life. A second challenge for Helen is coping with a "brilliant" and artistic sister who has been suffering with chronic pain for a long time, has "stopped going to the doctor for her pain," and "has become very withdrawn." Helen is coping with the challenge of having a self-isolating sister by *being proactive*, a lifelong theme, and actively helping her sister "get on top of herself and reach out."

Getting up and getting going are themes that have ensured Helen's well-being and vital living in the past and present. Connected closely to these two coping mechanisms is Helen's use of *self-talk* when she has "a day where she feels miserable." She says "Come on get up" and that

is exactly what she does. It “makes such a difference because otherwise, you can dwell on things and you can be miserable and just sit and slump, and sulk” Helen notes. Helen embraces “*making the most*” of life and carrying on through the good times and the bad times. Having humour in her life is an important theme that supports Helen’s ability to cope with all the past and present “hurdles” that life has put in her way. Laughingly she says “Vitamin H, it’s the best humour on earth...humour is important.” Having a sense of humour about or “making a little humorous” a lot of the negative things that she is faced with as an older adult is an ongoing theme and is essential for Helen to live a vital life at the beginning of her eighth decade. According to Helen, having a sense of humour “takes me away from what I could be worrying about, dwelling on” which in turn stops her from ruminating or dwelling on them, ensuring her emotional well-being and nurturing her high level of vitality. Helen believes that in order for people to live vitally they need to have fun with others and share their problems with others and, by doing so, can begin to “overcome” their problems.

Lifelong Learning, Education and Career

Helen’s life has encompassed both *formal and informal learning*, an important theme that continues to inform and spark her current life. At 18 years of age Helen decided to leave her family home in Surrey, England to train as a nurse in Liverpool, England. Helen’s mother supported her to make this hard decision by telling her “there’s nothing for you here.” Immigrating to Canada from England was a huge decision for Helen and “kind of sad,” but made easier by her mother’s encouragement and positive attitude. She notes, “I got my degree and then came over here [Canada]. And I’ve just travelled the world.”

Helen’s *career as a nurse* has been important, meaningful and contributed a lot to her vital life. Throughout a long career she has worked at hospitals, including a veteran’s hospital, and care facilities. Helen retired from nursing at 65 years of age. While working as a nurse in

Canada, before meeting and marrying her husband, Helen was able to do something *she “loves,” has always been passionate about, considers very educational and finds as “interesting” and exciting currently as in the past—travelling.*

Travel is a very significant aspect of Helen’s vital life and something she considers to be extremely educational. She reflects that for her to travel was “phenomenal” because her family never travelled anywhere when she was growing up. Helen comments that her ability to just get going and travel “surprised” her because she was “relatively reticent.” Recently Helen and her husband travelled by car to the Yukon and “touched the waters of the Arctic Ocean” which, according to Helen, was “a fabulous experience.” According to Helen, travelling means profound learning. The act of going somewhere different and experiencing a new landscape and being able to see the beauty in a landscape that is isolated, even alien, is exciting and meaningful for Helen and opens up new understanding of the way other people live connected and joyfully and are surviving well under difficult conditions.

Helen considers herself to be an open person. *Being open to continuing to learn new things* contributes a lot to Helen’s ability to live a vital life at the beginning of her eighth decade. She notes that she finds it “amazing” that she “can always learn something.” While Helen reflects that she has been slow to learn the “high tech stuff” because she is not interested in it, and she is adamant that she will not “get sucked into” technology, she does admit that she is “trying” to be more computer literate. She does have email and she does her writing on word perfect. She feels that allows her to have “some connection” to technology.

The Importance of Satisfying Relationships

Having close, caring, and supportive relationships with the members of her family has been, and continues to be a critical theme in Helen’s story of living a vital life. “Family means a lot to me” she exclaims strongly. She has a close relationship with her three living siblings (one

brother died at age 36 years), who range in age from 78 to 84 years, even though they live in different countries. Helen continued to go back and visit her parents at least once every two years until they died and always thought “how important it is for my children to see their grandparents.” Helen met her husband in 1964 while she was working in a small community up the British Columbia coast, and once they married and began to raise a family she worked as a nurse part time. Helen *credits her husband, “a real character,” with being instrumental in supporting her vital life* in the past and currently. According to Helen, her husband and she are compatible, family-oriented, and love to travel.

Helen’s three children have always been very important in her ability to live a vital and fulfilled life. Helen believes that *the contentment she derives from her children and grandchildren and the closeness they share are a significant source of her happiness and vitality.* Both *commitment to family and familial reciprocity* are major sources of Helen’s happiness and well-being and both contribute to her living a vital life. Helen’s children spend time with her and her husband as well as spending time with each other’s families, something that makes Helen “feel very good.” Helen comments that being able to have a close connection with her grandchildren and witness them “growing up and to see them getting on in life and doing well, it’s a real joy!”

Having a rich and meaningful social life, filled with friendships, has been an important and necessary part of Helen’s vital life, both in the past and currently. Helen is a good neighbour, friend, and community member. She has a large and diverse group of friends with whom she “gets along so well” and this contributes to her ability to live a vital life. “Chatting and sharing” including sharing “lots of laughter” with others is both interesting and “enjoyable” for Helen. She notes that *it is her “nature” to enjoy being with people, to “do a lot together,” to “share a lot together,” and to maintain long term, positive friendships.* Having good friends means Helen

is “never at a loss...I’ve got a lot of friends I can phone up” and ask for practical help or emotional support. She notes “I don’t feel that I’m that special a person” but she certainly felt special and “cared for” when over 70 friends joined her to celebrate her 70th birthday. *Knowing that she matters to her friends* is important to Helen and supports her vital life.

Keeping Active, Busy, and Involved by Having, Developing, and Pursuing Interests

“I am, really, very active,” states Helen. *Being active and actively engaged in living life is a critical component of Helen’s living a fulfilling, meaningful, and vital life* both in the past and in the present. Overall, she notes *she is a “doer” and she has always challenged herself to take risks and to try different things*. She agrees with her son’s observation that she “never sits down” and is “always busy” and reflects that she “enjoys” being busy and involved and that it is never “a strain or a stress.” Helen reflects “*I guess most of my life actually, I’ve been active.*” She continues to be involved in longer term activities such as participating in her church community, volunteering, gardening, being a member of the Royal Horticultural Society, travelling yearly, and spending quality time with her grandchildren. However, she also acknowledges that *the ways in which she lives vitally are “more diverse now.”* She is doing a number of newer and more challenging activities, for example: learning to play the piano; playing bridge; learning Spanish; writing; participating in the Healthy Heart Group, and belonging to a walking club. For Helen, *being “curious” drives her desire to develop interests* and contributes to living an interesting and vital life. According to Helen, people who are interested and curious have “always got something to do” and are “meeting people” with like interests and are “expanding their friendships and acquaintances.”

Helen believes that one of the most important “keys” to living a vital life in older adulthood is *having interests and keeping active* and that adults in their 50’s and 60’s should not only be developing interests outside of family and career, but should also *be willing to be*

continually open to trying new and more challenging activities. Helen thinks one of the reasons some older adults are not living as vital a life as she is, is that they “seem quite content to be leisurely and lazy and not do too much.” Helen stresses the importance of people being active long before they become older adults and would encourage them to “look into various clubs,” reach out to others, and not “sit home alone.” She observes “a lot” of lonely older adults, many of whom don’t have children, who aren’t living as vital a life as she is. She has advised people who are lonely and feeling sorry for themselves, *to reach out and go to their community centers, meet other people, and find something they are interested in and develop that interest.* In Helen’s opinion, people who haven’t developed other interests before they retire and/or don’t have children may be prone to leading “pretty hollow” lives. Helen notes that some people who are not living vital lives in older adulthood “seem envious” of activities that other people do. She believes that some people who are not living as vitally as she is are people who have negative attitudes about *taking risks and trying new things.* She suggests that *whatever a person has an interest in or thinks they might have an interest in, should be pursued, learned, and developed.* In her opinion, vital living in older adulthood is enhanced by *taking on new activities, some of which are difficult and challenging.*

Taking Personal and Social Responsibility

Taking personal and social responsibility and having an ethic of caring are lifelong themes, that contribute to Helen’s ability to continue to live a fully engaged, purposeful, meaningful, worthwhile, and vital life. She attributes her deep sense of personal and social responsibility and helping others to the values she learned as a child and adolescent and which continued to evolve throughout her nursing training and career. Helen takes responsibility for her physical and emotional health. She is a committed wife, mother, grandmother, and sister, as well as an involved neighbour, church participant, and community builder. At age 72 years, Helen’s

sense of personal and social responsibility appear to be fairly well-balanced; neither one seems to heavily outweigh the other.

Helen has an unshakeable desire to take the practical steps needed to help people more vulnerable than she and in so doing to teach others compassion as well as practical knowledge. Helen is very clear that *one of her lifelong goals has been and continues to be “to be of service to people by helping them.”* Being of service to others and *feeling that she is making a positive difference in people’s lives* provides a deeper level of meaning to Helen’s life, gives her hope, and is inextricably connected to her ability to live a vital life. Helen notes “I think to have been able to help the people I have helped I think has been an enormous gift” and she feels very fortunate to continue to be of service and to help others.

For Helen, helping extends beyond her family and volunteering to her neighbourhood, church, and community. She is an *active participant in community building*. Being engaged with other people and lending a helping hand when necessary, is connected to living a vital life for Helen because, as she notes, “if you can do something, you do it, and you feel good about helping.” Throughout her life, Helen has been a dedicated and hard worker, and she believes that *dedication, hard work, and being a conscientious and responsible person “builds up trust in other people.”* She says that people “trust me to do whatever they ask me to do” and that validates Helen’s sense of *being an ethical and dependable person—someone who can be counted on*—and this makes her feel good about herself. *Knowing that people have “confidence” in her* is very personally rewarding for Helen. Helen’s nursing career provided meaning and a sense of social responsibility because she believes she was “directed” to help others. Through her volunteering, family life, and current social interaction she feels she is still leading a meaningful and vital life. According to Helen, *giving of herself, making a difference in people’s lives, seeing positive results and being appreciated for her efforts* is very rewarding and

contributes greatly to a vital life. Helen was responsible for helping establish an Alzheimer's group for spouses of people living with Alzheimer's disease and she currently continues to *volunteer her time* with that group, a rich and rewarding learning experience which she says gives her "a great deal of pleasure."

Reaching out and reciprocity are themes that have played out through Helen's life and currently contribute a lot to her sense of well-being and living a vital life. "I'm great at reaching out...I'm a reacher-outer" Helen says. She notes that it is in her nature "to be outgoing, rather than retreat in." She reflects "*if I can share*, if I can give to someone, make someone happy, make someone laugh...if I can bring some lightness to people's lives...it is very therapeutic for me." Helen is able to reach out when she needs support or help and she also reaches out to others when they need support. Reaching out is an integral part of Helen's "*faith*" and is a critical factor in supporting her to live meaningfully and vitally.

Not Taking Things for Granted, Feeling Grateful and Blessed

Helen feels very blessed for the life she has and does not take her life for granted, themes that are lifelong, continue currently and contribute to her being able to live vitally. Gratitude is important and meaningful in Helen's life because *she feels that she has "so much to be thankful for."* She feels "*very blessed*" with her family and fortunate to have been able to adopt her two youngest children. In the midst of the interview Helen states "I've never really thought a great deal about what a vital life is" and revealing deep insight reflects "it's not until I sit and think *how fortunate I am...I've been blessed in so many ways. I have a tremendous group of friends that I am very, very blessed with...so I feel very lucky.*"

Helen credits *good health* as being *the most important factor* that enables her to live a vital life currently and feels very lucky to have not experienced debilitating illness in her life. She had hip surgery last year, noting that it "was not problem" and that she "sailed through it

very well.” Helen describes her *lifelong good health as a “blessing”* in her life, but also emphasizes *the importance of taking responsibility for one’s physical health early on*. She reflects “being in the health field most of my life; it’s kept me on my toes,” and made her aware how important a healthy diet is for maintaining a vital life. Helen appears to have practiced *self-discipline* regarding her health throughout her life, but she looks at people who have poor health and wonders “had they done something earlier in their life, would they be this way?” Helen *does not take her continued good fortune for granted*, noting “When I compare myself to other people—people that have been ill, people who have had tragedies incurred—I feel really, really blessed.” Helen fervently believes that people in their 50’s and 60’s should be vigilant about taking care of their health in order to continue to live vital, purposeful, and worthwhile lives in their 70’s, 80’s and 90’s. This advice is based on the way she *lives a life she believes is active, meaningful, purposeful, worthwhile, joyful and very vital*. Helen also feels blessed to have *always had a lot of energy throughout her life*.

Helen is aware that *as she ages, the more vital and joyful and active she is* and she views this as a blessing. When comparing herself to what her parents were like as they aged, Helen reflects “Mom had rheumatism and my dad did too and so they weren’t very active in their latter days.” Helen also *actively expresses her gratitude to others*. She remembers writing to her parents after having her first child and thanking them for the way she was raised. Throughout the interview Helen expressed *gratitude for all her more difficult and challenging experiences reflecting that they have “helped build my character.”*

Having a Purpose, Living a Worthwhile Life, and Looking Forward to Things

A strict upbringing and training as a nurse provided the foundation for Helen to live what she believes is *a worthwhile, meaningful and valued life*, which is intricately connected to her ability to continue to live a vital life in older adulthood. Helen reflects “in retrospect, looking

back,” she learned to “*put her priorities where they should be*” whether that be *working hard, caring for others and protecting the vulnerable, or being “very thrifty”* because by doing that she “*can perpetuate the good*” which ensures she feels “*good in herself*.”

Having a strong and meaningful beliefs or value system, developed in her childhood, adolescence, and training as a nurse, has been a critical theme throughout her life, and is a strong foundation for her current purposeful, satisfying, meaningful, and vital life. According to Helen she has been challenged at different points in her life to compromise her beliefs or values however she notes she has always stayed true to her values and beliefs. Helen’s story of her *small rebellion when nursing became unionized* reveals an important part of what makes her life worthwhile and contributes to her vital life presently, *including her strength of character through living her values and having a fighting spirit*. She reflects on how much she enjoyed nursing and how “absolutely alien” it was to her when she was told she would have to “check in and off duty nursing.” According to Helen she refused to sign out before she finished her job and notes “I really had to fight that.” She says “So it’s a *bit of the rebel in me maybe...I insist on doing a good job and finishing my work before I go home!* And I did not want overtime pay if I was checking off duty late.” *Making a difference, doing her best to either right a wrong or make sure a wrong doesn’t continue to happen, taking action, and speaking up*, contribute to Helen’s ability to sustain a vital life because it makes her “feel good” not only to do the right thing, but to be appreciated by the people she is helping and supporting.

Doing a good job, a crucial component of her value system and *enjoying doing it*, contributes greatly to Helen’s vital life because she says “It gives me contentment.” She explains “I’m not content or happy if I haven’t done all I could do or have done a good job.” Connected closely to doing a good job and *seeing things through* is Helen’s willingness to *persist or persevere at her endeavours*. She comments “I don’t give in easily.” *Perseverance and*

determination are lifelong themes, continuing in the present. Helen is learning to play piano well even though it is difficult for her. *Persevering with challenging endeavours* such as playing the piano and participating in the Sun Run and *getting better* as a result is an important and meaningful part of Helen's ability to live a vital life. She points out that these are two challenges that she wouldn't have taken on earlier in her life.

Being generative, including being a role model to younger generations, is an extremely important theme in Helen's current life and contributes to her feeling she is living a purposeful, worthwhile, and vital life. Helen feels not only personally energized but also that she is providing an important and life-affirming example to the younger generations by engaging in challenging, interesting, and thrilling adventures such as travelling to the Arctic. *Spending time with her grandchildren and being actively involved in their lives doing things with them and modeling the importance of being engaged in activities* is critical for Helen to continue to live a richly rewarding and vital life at 72 years of age. *Being a mentor to her grandchildren and learning from them* brings a lot of enjoyment into Helen's life and makes it meaningful and "fuller." Her granddaughter's musicality has inspired Helen to begin to learn to play the piano "properly." Helen believes she is both showing by example and teaching her grandchildren the importance of getting "involved with people" and having fun. Helen credits having "a good relationship and rapport" with the younger people in her life as positively impacting her ability to live vitally because "she can lose herself" *living in the moment* with them. *Making a positive difference in her grandchildren's lives and passing on her knowledge to them* is very meaningful for Helen and important to her sense of living a meaningful and vital life.

Helen is able to create and maintain a vital, meaningful, and worthwhile life for herself in some part because *she has dreams that she keeps alive*. While Helen is quite modest noting "I don't consider myself terribly talented," she dreams of writing a book one day. She reflects "I

keep journals of all our trips” and “I’m in the process of getting those on the computer.” She is currently “trying to master Spanish” because she wants to go to the Antarctic and “explore a little bit of South America.” Helen says this is “our next big dream.” *Having “a dream,” having something to look forward to, seeing things through and living her passions* are exciting, challenging, and critical for Helen to continue to live a vital life at 72 years of age.

Having a Sense of Personal Agency, Self-Knowing and Acceptance

In order to feel that her life is currently worthwhile and vital Helen describes her *need for personal agency and control over her life including having choices* and “that element of *making decisions for herself*.” She laughingly noted that a current challenge to her ability to continue to live a vital life at age 72 years is, in her words, “just *putting up with my husband*” and “*defending myself*.” Helen is quick to clarify that that while her husband is “a delightful character” he is an only child, raised in tough times by a single mother and he “was always in control.” In her words her husband “is a bit of a control freak and he admits that. And at times that’s a bit frustrating. But I’ve learned to stand up to it and put my foot down.” *Standing up for herself* appears to have been difficult for Helen and *something that she has challenged herself to do more and more in later adulthood*. To maintain her sense of personal agency Helen has learned to stand up for herself in her husband’s presence. Upon further reflection Helen states “I don’t mind jointly making decisions” but is very clear that she won’t allow another person to take control of her life. In comparison, “*intervening*” *on behalf of the vulnerable and living courageously* are lifelong themes that have not been difficult for Helen and are currently still important and support her to live a valued, empowered and vital life. She views herself as someone who *has the courage to stand up for her convictions and values and is willing to speak out against something that is wrong when it involves others*.

Being in control of her life, having choices, and making her own decisions contributes to Helen's ability to live a vital life at the beginning of her eighth decade because "it frees" her "from doing things" that she doesn't want to do. It frees her "from getting frustrated." Overall, having a sense of personal agency means that Helen feels she is being listened to and she acknowledges "it's nice to feel I am heard." Having a sense of personal agency for Helen also includes "*knowing herself*," something that has been a lifelong process of reflection. Helen explains *that knowing herself, being "comfortable" with herself* means that "certain problems don't become problems" because she doesn't "dwell" on them.

Having a philosophy or attitude of "acceptance" is a theme that Helen believes *has become more important in her life as she ages. Being accepting* is empowering and helps Helen "*not worry*" which means *she has less stress and more calm in her day-to-day life*. She shared a fairly recent, very difficult, and extremely painful personal challenge wherein she felt her "hands were tied" and "the problem was beyond her control." Helen shared that this "has probably been the major, major problem" in her life. She asked me not to include the details in the narrative; however she gave me permission to describe how she coped with this significant challenge. Overall, *she practiced acceptance and letting go*. Helen noted "*just being there*" for the people involved, was important in order for her to cope, enabling her to feel that her energy wasn't being drained. *Reaching out, "being supportive" and "expressing love"* to the family members involved was how Helen specifically coped with this particular challenge. She felt empowered by being accepting and letting go and showing her love and support. *In older adulthood, Helen has learned to cope with certain challenges by "letting go" and accepting that she cannot control what other adults are going to do. This particular sense of agency was new learning for Helen, because, up to this point in her life, Helen had tended to "intervene" and try to "change"*

the situation when she believed something to be “wrong” which had previously led to a lot of frustration.

The Importance of Financial Security

According to Helen, *having a solid financial foundation in later adulthood* is an “absolutely” critical factor in being able to live a vital life. Along with having good health, Helen considers *having adequate finances* essential to living vitally as an older adult. Throughout their married life, Helen and her husband *thought about, made choices, planned, and saved* for their retirement. Currently they are in a very good financial position to enjoy doing all the things that they love doing that contribute to their vital living. Helen very clearly states that her husband and she “thought ahead” about finances and that “it is important that people do think ahead!” Helen elaborates on how her husband and she ensured their financial freedom in older adulthood and the meaning she derives from it. They “paid” off the mortgage on their house in ten years because, in Helen’s words, “we were determined not to spend our life in debt.” Helen further notes “We’ve got a suite for our old age.” According to Helen her husband and she have options including staying in her home or selling it and continuing to travel. *Having options due to having adequate finances* makes Helen’s life even more exciting and more vital.

In Helen’s experience as an older adult having financial security ensures that she “can be free” to be active and do all the things that she still wants to do including going to concerts and travelling. For Helen financial freedom means that she doesn’t “have that worry” of knowing “oh, I can’t afford it,” something that she “hears quite often from other older adults” and something that she feels is “sad.” Helen reflects on the fact that having adequate financial resources means that she can be “*fairly generous*” and “*donate to the charities*” she sees as deserving. This is also a meaningful and worthwhile part of her life and contributes to her sense of living vitally. Helen believes that middle-aged adults need to actively financially plan and

save money for their later adulthoods because she notes “we don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Embracing New Experiences and Living in the Moment

Looking forward to fulfilling her dreams and being open to the many experiences she will continue to engage in and the new ones she will discover, some which challenge her abilities and comfort zone, are critical to Helen’s sense of continuing to live a meaningful and vital life. “I’ve still got a lot to do in my life. So, I’ve got to hang on!” she says. Helen and her husband are looking forward to going to “The Holy Land” in October of this year.

Also connected strongly to living a vital life is Helen’s *capacity to be spontaneous and live life in the moment* which is apparent in her *love of nature*. She notes “I garden. Everybody loves my garden and I love it too!” She reflects “gardening means a lot to me!” Helen describes how nature is so “beautiful” and so “fascinating” and so rife with “colors. In nature, in her garden, Helen has a sanctuary within which she finds peace and is able to reflect and restore her energy. Within her garden Helen notes “I just let my mind wander. It’s just peaceful.” Helen reflects that when she is “out in the garden there are always people stopping to chat and share in the gardens.” For Helen, her garden becomes a place of *communicating with others, sharing and learning and teaching*, all things critical to ensure that her life is worthwhile and vital. Nature is also important to living a vital life for Helen. “*I love nature*” reflects Helen. She does a lot of bird watching noting that the birds’ “antics are phenomenal” and that she “continually marvels at nature.”

Helen’s *ability to experience nature in the moment and feel appreciation for it* contributes to her living a vital life in a number of ways. Being in nature “encourages” her to get out and see and observe “other people walking and to connect with them by greeting them and wishing them a “good morning.” This “sets the tone for the day.” Helen comments “*I get a joy*

out of being” in nature. Upon further reflection she exclaims that experiencing being in nature is “*a sense of freedom*” for her, enabling her to “just set her day” or “*meditate on how fortunate she is.*” Helen derives a sense of comfort from being able to appreciate, feel grateful for, and have a sense of freedom from being in and experiencing nature. According to Helen, in nature, she is “at ease” and does not feel stress and that brings her comfort.

Living in the moment for Helen also connects to *having a strong sense of her womanhood*, of being a woman and enjoying the chemistry and flow of energy between herself and the opposite sex, something that was apparent to her throughout her nursing/volunteering career as well as currently. With regard to “flirting,” she enjoys socializing with the opposite sex and has “a lot of fun.” She notes “*I enjoy the opposite sex, and seeing them and good fun. We have lots of good laughs...*”

Metaphor for Living a Vital Life

Being open, embracing new experiences, and living in the moment, is encapsulated in the metaphor that Helen chose as capturing what it means for her to live a vital life as a seventy-two year old woman. Helen’s metaphor is a “*treadmill.*” In her words:

I guess I could say a vital life is like running on a treadmill. You can go as slow or as fast as you like. You can laugh. You can skip. You can enjoy being stupid. You can do all sorts of things, all sorts of exercises on a treadmill. And yet, you’re moving! And the thing is, to keep going! Don’t be afraid of trying...You can have fun on a treadmill. You can allow your mind to dwell on things that may direct you to, maybe, dancing!

The image of running on a treadmill highlights the importance of Helen being able to *fully embrace the paths that open up to her, including savouring every moment, having fun, laughing, risking, reflecting, keeping going, no matter what, and never being afraid of trying things that*

might appear scary or daunting or difficult. For Helen, living a vital life at age 72 years is about *being courageous enough to dance through life.*

Tangible Representation of Living a Vital Life

Helen chose photographs of her travels as being most meaningfully representative of how she has always lived a vital life, and continues to do so in the present. In her words travelling to the Arctic:

just made me feel so good...and what we experienced driving up there, the beauty of it was that you're miles from anywhere. I mean, it's really isolated. But we met some wonderful people where we stayed. And then when we did the dog sledding, they told us to talk to the dog...and which way to go. [laughing] And it was fun! And it was a really great experience that you can't experience everyday down here! So, you had to make the effort to go there! And I thoroughly enjoyed it!

Making the effort to learn something new, risk taking, stretching her comfort zone, and connecting with people thriving in different life circumstances than hers is hopeful, validating, and life affirming for Helen and fuels her current very vital life.

APPENDIX H: TANGIBLE REPRESENTATIONS OF VITAL LIVING

Figure H.1 Don's flagship commercial building

Photograph Taken by Mark Pedlow, Kenwood Construction.



Figure H.2 Shirley and her father

Photographer Unknown, Photo provided by Shirley.



Figure H.3 Shirley and her father on Citadel Hill, Halifax, NS

Photographer Unknown, Photo provided by Shirley.



Figure H.4 Jean in her Red Hat Society outfit

Photograph Taken by Author.



Figure H.5 Art in front of: the Tantalus Mountain Range (Brohm Lake area); the Hollyburn Fir; and the big rhododendron bush near his home
Photographer Unknown, Photos provided by Art.



Figure H.6 John as an infant being held by his mother

Photographer Unknown, Photo provided by John.



Figure H.7 John's hiking boots

Photographer Unknown, Photo provided by John.



Figure H.8 The cabin Clarence helped build

Photographer Unknown, Photo provided by Clarence.



Figure H.9 The view from Clarence's cabin

Photographer Unknown, Photo provided by Clarence.



Figure H.10 Henry playing his cello

Photograph Taken by Author.



Figure H.11 Margarita holding her tennis racquet

Photograph Taken by Author.



Figure H.12 Helen, travelling the world

Photograph Taken by Author.



APPENDIX I: INDIVIDUAL CATEGORIES AND CODES

Table I.1 Don (73 years old)

Categories	Codes
Financial Security and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having financial security and being wealthy • freedom to live his life the way he wants to and do what he want to because he has lots of options • having financial freedom and not having to worry about not having enough finances
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having satisfying relationships • having close, connected relationships with his children and grandchildren • being there for his children and being dependable • shares himself with his family, friends, and acquaintances • satisfaction and vitality from the friendships he has made and sustained over the years • feels comfort knowing he has satisfying and supportive relationships with family and friends • feels invigorated when he is with other people
Lifelong Learning, Goal Setting, Hard Work and Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning, both formal and informal • indomitable work ethic • “made up for his inadequacies with a lot of hard work” • being engaged “in business world for 55 years” was a fertile place of learning • Don’s successful careers have been a source of excitement and exhilaration for him • goal setting • keeps mentally active and fit through his work • continuing to have ambition, set goals and be excited about all the possibilities that are still a big part of his life • “I’ve got to have excitement in my life”
Keeping Busy and Involved by Having Interests and Staying Fit, Active, and Healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping busy and involved by having, developing and pursuing diverse interests • when he is busy he feels full of energy • maintains an acute interest in the real estate market, the community he lives in and the ups and downs of the economy • loves and respects nature and spends a lot of time both working in it and enjoying it • enjoys his work • staying fit, active and healthy • quit drinking alcohol • leads a “wholesome” life • in excellent health • views himself as much younger than 73 years old • viewing himself in a younger light because of his ability to live spontaneously in the moment • pride in his physical strength and capability

Table I.1 Don (73 years old)

Categories	Codes
Carrying On, Adapting to Change and Coping with Life's Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying on, adapting to change, and coping with loss and life's challenges • challenge is accepting the relationship with his wife as is, without intimacy • breakup of marriage and loss of intimacy • • making it the "best relationship" he can under the circumstances • having the courage of his convictions and standing up for what he believes is right even if it is not politically correct is a meaningful way for him to live his life • learned to release his emotions • able to express his feelings • having a spiritual aspect to his life • comfort this spiritual element fosters in Don—someone is watching over him
Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal agency including having choices and control • has a lot of authority and control—being the boss means he has a lot of control in his life • decision-making is a key factor in Don's self-efficacy • he feels he as "value" • has passion for, and is proud of the work he does whether job related, community related, maintenance related or socially related • being capable and/or competent • positive and optimistic outlook on life • having a desire to win • "to want to win is a must" • Don has a vital sense of humour and enjoys his life and has fun • learning to say "no" • not to be afraid to say "no" to something they don't want to do • importance of being selective • being an honourable person • perseveres • can be counted on to tell the truth and follow through on any commitment he makes • determined • someone who can be trusted

Table I.1 Don (73 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things Achieving and Having Success and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life • achieving and success • effort and a vital life are synonymous • very open about personal price that he has paid as a result of his success • having a successful enough business, being a productive member of society and knowing he is making a positive difference in other people's lives • do productive things • live their lives and "do" their lives "well" • "success is the greatest form of happiness in the world" • "do your job with excellence" • being proactive and productive • giving his best effort and doing the best job he can in any undertaking is his passion • self-respect • "you've always got to find ways to make it better" • making a difference in people's lives - in some small or bigger way life is better for others because he is alive • finding something that he can improve on every day and then doing it • one person can make a huge difference • "have integrity, pay your way in life, and help somebody along the way"
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal responsibility • takes responsibility for having created and continuing to create the life that is important and meaningful to him • very generative • making a positive difference in people's lives • reciprocity feeds his vital life • helping others • he is a good communicator with members of all generations • both a teacher and a student of life • taking social responsibility • cares deeply not only about his own family but about other people as well • tends to be direct and straightforward • proactive in his caring • a giving and generous person
Feeling Fortunate for His Life, Loss, Accepting Inevitable Changes, Adapting and Carrying on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don feels grateful and "fortunate" • "I was very blessed" • creating memorable and meaningful memories—he feels fortunate and grateful for the satisfaction that memories bring into his life • Don is no stranger to loss • coming to terms with his marital situation and accepting the changes inherent in such a loss • doesn't ruminate or dwell on any of the losses in his life • carries on, accepts that he cannot have both an intact marriage and continue to work as hard at his business • adapts • he has had to reinvent his life to some degree and make some changes

Table I.1 Don (73 years old)

Categories	Codes
Self-Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-reflection • “a desire to be the best he can be” • his “innermost need “to do the best job he can” • engaging with and both serving and being served well by others • having recognition from others • being highly respected • being needed is the pinnacle of recognition for Don • being needed by others helps him “grow” • giving of himself or financially and helping people and being helped • not afraid to make mistakes frees Don to take risks, make decisions, and not worry • learn from the mistakes he has made • challenge himself to risk and take some chances in all aspects of his life • embracing experiences that are challenging

Table I.2 Elisabeth (69 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Adequate Financial Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having adequate financial security • having a good work ethic • importance of financial freedom • not having to worry about having enough money to maintain her current lifestyle • living vitally for her is having enough financial security to “own a roof over her head,” take care of her health and do the things that enrich and make her life full
The Importance of Satisfying , Caring, Connected and Sharing Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having satisfying, affectionate, connected and sharing relationships • satisfying relationships are reciprocal • having had a loving and close relationship with her mother and father • having a large and supportive extended family • feeling feminine and enjoying being a woman • wonders what her life might have been like if she had children • having a rich social life and satisfying and connected relationships with friends and acquaintances • being around younger people • the ability to connect with others physically • engaging with people • sharing herself with others • communicating and connecting with others and making their day a bit better • balancing private and social life and feeling comfortable and content when she is by herself
Keeping Active and Involved by Having and Enjoying Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping active and involved by having and enjoying interests and having fun doing them • challenging herself to do different types of activities • having diverse interests and being open to new activities • numerous life experiences • almost insatiable curiosity • doing activities with others and sharing experiences • “lively” • interested in life and in all kinds of people from all walks of life • being spontaneous and living in the moment • being in the moment as she journeys forth

Table I.2 Elisabeth (69 years old)

Categories	Codes
Carrying On, Adapting and Coping with Life's Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying on, adapting and coping with life's challenges • having the ability to adjust and adapt to life's changes and challenges • planning—having a plan A and a plan B • openness to change • having a rich and meaningful spiritual life • “look after one another and be thy brother's keeper” • having a love of nature • spirituality and reflecting on life and nature • perspective-taking • sorting things out and working through things • figuring things out, thinking things through and finding another way around something that doesn't seem to be working • perseverance and determination and seeing things through • acknowledging her feelings, listening to them and being proactive about “getting busy and doing things” instead of worrying and ruminating • having good health is important • did not dwell or ruminate on her health challenges • having values and effective coping skills
Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having personal agency • learning, education, both formal and informal, and having a meaningful career • “I haven't stopped learning! And I hope I never do!” • learning keeps her mentally fit by “broadening” her mind • self-reflection • she has reflected a lot • being an independent person, having choices and making decisions and having a lot of control in her life • choice to create a wonderful and valued life • free to do what she wants, when she wants • having the choice whether she lives or dies if faced with “an undignified passing”
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life • open-minded and open to others • respects other people's freedom to say what they believe • listening to others and trying not to be judgmental • having few regrets, little guilt and little need to feel she has to apologize to others • keenly observant about, interested in, and excited about everything around her • having goals • having short term goals as opposed to longer term goals • does not procrastinate quite as much • getting on with and doing things and working toward something • giving her best effort • having a passion for her career

Table I.2 Elisabeth (69 years old)

Categories	Codes
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal responsibility • takes responsibility for her words and actions • generative • making a contribution that helps make a difference • laying a healthy emotional foundation for children • attempts to make a difference for younger generations • taking social responsibility • a giving person who has always volunteered • contributing to science via the medical field as a teaching patient and research participant is very purposeful and meaningful • giving and receiving • feels a lot of internal validation for the person she is and the contributions she makes
Not Taking Things for Granted, Loss and Accepting Inevitable Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not taking things for granted and feeling fortunate for all the wonderful things in her life • feels very blessed and grateful • “accumulated” wonderful and profound memories • many of the memories that nurture Elisabeth’s current vital life come from childhood • acceptance • she needs support and she welcomes this support in her life • importance of interdependence • Elisabeth has experienced a lot of loss in more recent years
Having a Positive Attitude, a Sense of Humour and Being Optimistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a positive attitude, being optimistic, having a sense of humour and not taking herself too seriously • “being happy and/or at peace” • having hope and being a hopeful person • capacity for trust

Table I.3 Shirley (80 years old)

Categories	Codes
Financial Security and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring having adequate finances to take care of herself and not having to worry about having enough finances • have enough funds to not just exist but to live an enjoyable and vital life and do the things she enjoys doing • enough financial security • compensate • “creative about what she wants to do” • important to be aware of one’s financial situation, have control of one’s own finances and establish one’s own capacity for financial independence

Table I.3 Shirley (80 years old)

Categories	Codes
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family interaction and support • satisfying and sharing relationships • “somebody cares about me” • being cared about “provides a bit of a safety factor” and consolation • “comfort that I’m not really alone” • feeling of “security” • would like close and connected relationships with all three children • has open and honest communication and “very good conversations” with oldest son • family upheaval because of divorce • her life would be even more vital if she had closer relationship with daughter • accept • social interaction and relationships outside immediate family • important to be “open” and try “to listen to what other people have to say” • maintaining long term friendships • engaging with people, “to get out and be around people,” even people she doesn’t know • being selective about the people with whom she invests her time and energy and with whom she shares her “self” • sifting out “toxic” relationships
Lifelong Learning and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning and education, both formal and informal • learned to use her brain • importance of keeping mentally fit • her father modeled “living his life,” living life as a “constant exploration” and have respect and love nature, be curious, and be involved and interested in life • love and passion for music • studied “existentialism • music teacher • “fanatic reader” • “exercise brain power”
The Importance of Routines and Ongoing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having and developing interests that are enjoyable and fun • diverse interests/activities • having a routine and keeping varied activities going every day • “Globe and Mail” • persevering and seeing things through • giving good effort and doing a good job • a strong work ethic and self-discipline • new activity has to be interesting, challenging and enjoyable

Table I.3 Shirley (80 years old)

Categories	Codes
Carrying On and Coping with Life's Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • huge challenge of marriage and toll it took on her • “not to be a victim,” not allowing herself to feel sorry for herself by engaging in life with determination and zest • always fought against being a “non-entity” • carrying on, no matter what life tosses your way • doing things to the best of her ability and stubbornness or tenacity and determination • belief in spirituality; “a lot of times, there’s someone up there looking after me” • “acceptance;” accepts all aspects of her life including what is good and what is bad • cannot accept or resolve 2 long term challenges • either heal broken relationships or accept they can’t be healed and “let go” • problem-solving • reach out to others • being proactive
A Sense of Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a sense of personal agency since divorce • taking charge of her life and empowering herself • made a life for herself that is meaningful and that she values • just doing the things she had to do in order to survive financially and finding out she could do it • taking control of her life and having control as long as possible • being responsible for her own life and happiness • successfully managing her own life • growth of self-confidence • aware of choices she has • decision-making • think ahead, plan, sets goals, takes advantage of choices • develop interests and skills needed to pursue those interests • adapting, being open to change and reinvention of her life after her divorce • taking actions to “accept her life” while continuing to make positive changes when necessary • being forthright and honestly expressing her opinions • more inclined as older adult “to say and do what I want” • having a positive attitude and an optimistic outlook on life • has to work harder to maintain her positive attitude • can be depended on • commitment, enthusiasm, passion, love • having a sense of humour and not taking herself too seriously • balance in her life which stops her dwelling or ruminating on the little things • loving being a woman and enjoying the freedom associated with being single • “I really like my life the way it is” • people who are not vital = “in a rut” and have given up and aren’t trying anymore and are self-isolating and need to expose themselves to communities and society • empowering herself to be free • “willingness to try new things, not be afraid to experiment, or be rejected” • “willingness to try anything” • “willingness to sort of stick my neck out a bit and try new things or look for opportunities to try new things” • experiences both negative and positive “played a role in contributing to the person I am today”

Table I.3 Shirley (80 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life • having something to look forward to; “always looks forward to” orchestra • being open to and embracing new experiences • having a passion for and being excited by life and living in the moment • doesn’t “think she’s changed very much” over her lifetime • always lived passionately in the moment – having something to be passionate about • “music is the center of my soul” • “inner peace” = “deeply satisfying” • very generative • have taken care of and continues to take care of the generations that come after her • showed a lifelong willingness to care for the next generations, including those not biologically related to her • “If you’re a mother; you’re always a mother” • “butterflies are free” • “really trying to do something with her life” and “putting some effort into trying to shape herself and her life and trying to be good to people around her is freeing”
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal responsibility for her children and herself • in late adulthood she recognizes that her responsibility is more and more about taking care of herself • “I have to look after myself; I have to take responsibility for myself” • “keeping herself healthy” and “active” • enjoys lifelong excellent health • practice more self-care and look after her health • “keeping active physically” = “engaging in activities” that get her up and about • being conscientious and caring for her mother • seeing something through to the end • memory-making and reliving of experiences and memories of “great times” they had shared • both the giving and the satisfaction gained from giving are reasons “for living into old age” • taking social responsibility for helping and giving back to the community and those less fortunate • to “be a whole person” and “important to her own development” needs to give back to others without any thought of personal gain • belief in volunteering and being involved in community and society • giving of herself
Feeling Fortunate for Her Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fortunate and grateful for the many experiences throughout her life, good and bad • “It’s a Wonderful World” • does not take any of her life for granted

Table I.3 Shirley (80 years old)

Categories	Codes
Loss, Acceptance and Adapting to Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledging and accepting that illness and/or disability is a possibility and death inevitable , but not dwelling on her own mortality • “accepting” that death is inevitable and a natural part of living • even if physically disabled could still have a “useful” or vital life if mind alert • adapt • finds “aging process interesting” • compensation • loss through physical and/or mental decline, illness and death more prevalent
Living a Principled Life and Self-Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-examination/self-reflection • deep reflection • “very strong principles” = “essence of what is important in her life” • fulfilled • story of self-examination, including questioning and the quest for understanding • “nothing is for a certainty”

Table I.4 Jean (71 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Adequate Financial Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having adequate financial security • not having to worry about having enough finances • having the financial foundation to travel, do activities she enjoys doing, and participate in perspective broadening events is critical
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having close, caring and sharing relationships • connecting with others • relationship with her daughter • a vital life is “more about connection with people” than anything else • her granddaughter has brought joy and energy into her life • Jean and her husband are compatible in many of their interests and have a close, respectful, communicative and loving relationship • Jean has become aware of how important compromise is for a peaceful and meaningful life • knowing she has someone she can always count on • shares good chemistry with her husband ensuring an ongoing and exciting sex life • experiences sexual intimacy as “an emotional connection” • “keeps me active and stimulated and it keeps me a lot younger” • having a rich social life including supportive, caring and sharing relationships with friends • she knows what matter to her and she won’t settle for less • she has no fear of reaching out to people and touching them in a deep feeling place • “thrives on the energy” and meaning produced when connecting on such a deep level • all her friends tend to be living vital lives • being selective about the people she chooses to have in her life

Table I.4 Jean (71 years old)

Categories	Codes
Lifelong Learning , Education, Self-Examination, Reflection and Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning both formal and informal • lifelong journey of self-examination through reflection and understanding • being open to new challenges and/or a belief in fate • “started doing something different—working on herself” with help of therapy and taking control of her life • her ability to cope with her feelings and life’s challenges in meaningful and emotionally healthy ways evolved • “I can now smell the roses” • having a life that’s an open book • “I don’t have to be a phony; I can just be myself” • belief in the spiritual world • gaining knowledge and wisdom
Keeping Active and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests, and Creating Memories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping active and involved both mentally and physically by having, developing and pursuing interests • an element of planning and having a routine or regimen • keeping her mind stimulated and active • engages in different experiences and activities and meets different people and is opening and stimulating her mind and “always broadening her perspective on life” • being engaged doing the things she loves and at times finds challenging • loves the challenge of figuring things out • extremely creative • has created and continues to create lasting memories of connectedness with others past and present • experience the “connectedness with everything” including every positive experience • be kind to others
Carrying On, Accepting, Adapting, and Coping with Life’s Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying on, accepting, adapting, and coping with life’s challenges are lifelong themes • perseverance and determination • takes responsibility for the quality of her life • viewing herself as the creator of the life she values • motivation and a good work ethic • not ever having been a worrier • awareness that acceptance of what she cannot change, adaptation, and change are very necessary and important factors • openness to change, including changing her mind about things • being outspoken, straightforward and honouring her unique personhood • living authentically and being herself • being able to deal with the consequences of her actions • healing damaged relationships and not feeling guilty • healing the broken relationships with her brother and mother

Table I.4 Jean (71 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Sense of Personal Agency Through Control, Choices, Being Heard and Seen and Being a Fighter and a Rebel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a sense of personal agency • being a fighter and a rebel albeit currently in more mellowed forms • a “feisty” character • having a lot of control over her life • “sort of learned over the years that you get more flies with honey than you do with vinegar” • being daring and adventurous • satisfaction and a sense of independence • being both a fighter and fiercely independent • Jean feels empowered knowing she has choices and can make decisions • having a more productive day • choosing to do something positive each and every day • refusing to be a victim • having the choice to decide how she will live the life she values • efficacious—through perspective-taking and by deciding to align herself with positive ways of being rather than negative ones • having a positive and optimistic outlook on life • having a positive attitude about herself and life • feeling optimistic • being seen and heard • when people hear her, Jean feels that she matters and that what she says is important • a lot of hope for the future and knowledge that people are indeed capable of change
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile life • has created a meaningful and valued life • a positive role model to others • open, optimistic, kinder and helpful • belief in value of her own uniqueness and honouring the uniqueness of all people • goal setting • does things to the very best of her ability • she gives her best effort, whether or not the results are what she expected • “I want to do the very best job that I can do for as long as I’m here” • Jean’s purpose for living is that she wants to leave the world a better place for her offspring • reciprocity of caring and supporting one another • having a grandchild gives Jean “more reason for living” and makes her feel that her life continues to have purpose • having a grandchild has inspired Jean to look at her life and make positive changes where necessary • feels her life is purposeful and worthwhile because she also inspires others • being with younger generations and feeling she is making a difference in their lives • being with younger people and experiencing their energy and enthusiasm • to feel appreciated and valued • connection to nature • she gathers “universal energy” from her connection to “the trees, the flowers, the dogs, the cats”
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal responsibility for her life • by being physically and emotionally healthy • a giving person • being socially responsible through volunteering

Table I.4 Jean (71 years old)

Categories	Codes
Not Taking Things for Granted, Feeling Fortunate for Life, Loss and Inevitable Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not taking things for granted, feeling fortunate for life, loss and inevitable changes • not taking things for granted and feeling fortunate and blessed for her wonderful life • “I feel that I’m very, very blessed” • more involved in “spirituality” as a significant factor for no longer taking things for granted • living her life from a perspective of feeling gratitude • a philosophy of life in which she feels connected to “the whole universe” • “life is very easy, I have no fears” • physical losses are an inevitable part of Jean’s life as she ages and she accepts this reality but refuses to allow it to keep her from enjoying her life and living vitally • “I’ve noticed...probably about 65 years of age that my energy level is not the same as it used to be” • compensates for what she can no longer physically do by adapting and doing things she enjoys that require less physical exertion • she accepts that death is a part of life and that worse than death would be to live unengaged, uninspired and uninvolved
Having Fun, Being Spontaneous and Enjoying Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having fun while connecting with others, being active, not worrying and being spontaneous • enjoying life • having a wonderful sense of humour • ability to live spontaneously in the moment • continued journey of self-reflection/self-examination and growth • she has learned to life fully in the moment, express her feelings freely and let go of what she has no control over • proactive • “get off their ass and just live life” • being spontaneous throughout her life • enjoy themselves and not take life too seriously • participates in the Red Hat Society • having fun and being “really silly” helps Jean “get out of the box” and live in the moment • savours and enjoys the feeling of freedom and fun living in the moment imparts
Having a Passion in Life, Setting Goals, Giving Good Effort and Building Self-Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a passion in life, setting goals, giving good effort and building self-esteem • having a passion in life • painting has been a major process of healing • stop striving for perfection • through painting she tapped into her worthiness • self-esteem bloomed • from self-acceptance grew a greater acceptance of others

Table I.5 Art (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Financial Security and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong theme of the importance of ensuring freedom from financial woes and not worrying about having enough finances • having adequate finances • hard work, “putting up with” things, education, tenacity and perseverance were the stepping stones to financial security • a strong work ethic • being personally and financially responsible—never shirked taking responsibility • theme of tenacity, will and self-responsibility resonated throughout his life • fulfilling life • has allowed him to create and sustain the vital and valued life he desires • “can now do the things he wants”
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a satisfying social life including feeling comfortable within these relationships • physical activities must be balanced with social engagement • having an easy going disposition and having disdain for interpersonal conflict • being engaged in activities in his community and meeting new people • having a close and caring and supportive relationship with his children • having love and companionship with his current partner is fulfilling • current partner is his “greatest passion”
Lifelong Learning and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning and education, both formal and informal • keeping mentally fit • tendency to be a maverick • unorthodoxy, eagerness to try new things and independent-mindedness • volunteering in an effort to give back to his community and society
Having and Pursuing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being keenly interested in something you enjoy and have fun doing and proactive and active throughout life • having diverse interests • having an overall interest in life and his community • keeping mentally fit and physically active • giving good effort in activities he takes on • older adults have all had tragedies but are living vitally because they are keeping “busy and involved”
Staying Fit, Active and Healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having good health • taking responsibility for his health • exercise, fitness , and self-discipline • living actively engaged in the moment • self-care • adapt fitness activities

Table I.5 Art (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Carrying On and Coping with Life's Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to “carry on” in the face of life’s losses and challenges • “I always carry on” • “coping,” “understanding,” “acceptance,” “shared decision-making,” and adapting and “reinvention” of his life • “I had to cope because I was the caregiver” • sense of humour • reached out for help • decision-making • “react to circumstances” • “letting go,” and accepting he has no control over some things • planning and the ability to respond and react when his plans go awry • being open to change
Having a Sense of Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a sense of personal agency • having and making choices and making decisions • having goals • seeing things through • being independent, in control and being able to make choices about how he lives his life and where he invests his energy • having something to look forward to • figuring things out and challenging himself in the process • tenacity, perseverance and fearlessness • selectivity—doing things he wants to do • balance between private life and social life • “budget my energy” • ability to be dogged • metaphor of “living life in the moment” but also “revelling in the moment
Being Open to and Embracing New Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning and doing new things or being open to new experiences makes his life purposeful and worthwhile • “enjoying life and going with the flow” • does what he loves • interesting and meaningful life • deriving pleasure from simple things • living a more balanced and relaxed life currently • looks forward to playing ukulele which is a passion for him • looks forward to playing in seniors’ band • band performs in seniors’ homes • “taking on things I’m no good at” is mentally stimulating and physically energizing • important to no always take the easiest route • “cockiness” • “self-satisfied” • “self-confidence” • tangible: having memories of being engaged in both worlds (city and nature) • love and respect of nature

Table I.5 Art (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Not Taking Things for Granted and Accepting Inevitable Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doesn't take things for granted • "outlandish" or "a maverick" • realized and accepted that there are limitations involved with aging • the lessening of physical strength • acceptance—not feeling discouraged because he cannot excel at everything he tries • being comfortable with who he is/self-accepting and doesn't have to "prove anything to" himself • comfortable in his skin • acknowledging illness is a possibility and death is inevitable, but not dwelling on his own mortality • loss through physical and/or mental decline, illness and death is more and more a "sad" fact of life.
Being Grateful for Life's Gifts and the Gift of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feelings of gratitude for the many good things in his life • having a positive attitude—believes good things "seem to happen to me" • "luckiest guy in the world" • feels fortunate for good health and physical strength • appreciation for his life, past and present • derive strength for living from "sum total of all my experiences and maybe it's a bit of selfishness too" • "selfishness" or "exclusivity = choosing activities that "work for me" • grateful for his children's acceptance of his current relationship • feels grateful for man-made and natural worlds

Table I.6 John (82 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Financial Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having adequate finances throughout his life • importance of having money available • being in a financially adequate position since retirement has enabled him to give his children and grandchildren "a hand" financially • currently being financially "comfortable" means John doesn't have to worry about money • being able to enjoy the activities he does and/or anything he wants to do because he has the financial means • he is "not extravagant" • advice to younger people is "get an RRSP and TFSA (Tax Free Savings Account)" • "critical for a vital life as one ages" to really have an relaxed retirement is to have the income • adequate finances are essential

Table I.6 John (82 years old)

Categories	Codes
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships and Sharing With Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crucial importance of family is threaded through every major theme in his narrative • having satisfying relationships and being able to share his life with others • having close, loving, caring, and sharing relationships with his family • having had a strong, loving and compatible marriage for 48 years • being able to raise their daughters, follow their dreams and support each others' careers • having a close, loving, supportive and meaningful relationship with his daughters and grandchildren • having a caring and compatible common law relationship • need for sharing himself and his life with someone • chemistry he has with his partner • having a social life • engaging and sharing himself with friends and acquaintances • very much enjoys the "camaraderie"
Lifelong Learning , Education and Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning and formal and informal education • learning to be a team player, negotiator and leader through sports • developed a good work ethic and gives his best effort • lifelong capacity for emotional intelligence through qualities of maturity, leadership, trustworthiness, confidence, nurturing and fairness • perseverance and determination • "certainly smart about dealing with life" • lots of diverse life experiences • being curious and interested in many aspects of life • having a keen and active mind • when he teaches people how to do things, he is keeping his mind active, feeling good, and ensuring his own vitality • mainly keeps his mind keen through being with other people and engaging in activities, mostly physical
Keeping Active and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having and developing different interests and activities, mostly physical • keeping physically active and exercising • athleticism has always played a large role in his vital life • loves the challenge and physicality of hiking plus the fun • "hiking is" John's "passion" • he doesn't view himself as old • John continues to challenge himself and enjoy the sense of accomplishment he feels doing the activities he did when he was in his 60's • able to deal with pressure • being open to what he experiences in each and every moment of a hike • the joy he takes in being in nature • his love of nature inspires him • enjoying being in nature • finds travelling interesting and stimulating • adventure travelling and hiking with Elder Hostel which John finds exciting and invigorating because it involves an element of risk-taking • "calculated risk-taking" • exciting to accomplish something that is more challenging for him • not someone who likes to take the "easier way" around things • achievement through calculated risk-taking

Table I.6 John (82 years old)

Categories	Codes
Carrying On, Adapting, and Coping with Life's Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying on, adapting and coping with life's challenges • having no serious regrets • not having remorse • "always" having "been there" for his loved ones and no regrets about the role he played in their lives • adapted to challenges inherent in losing his most significant loved ones from a very young age and successfully doing that • being able to adapt and change • adapt and reinvent his life to lesser or greater degrees • prepares himself as much as he can for what may happen next in his life • "always looking ahead" • indomitable optimism • "I'm eternally optimistic" and "I just tend to see the bright side of things" • having a wonderful sense of humour, being able to laugh at himself and life's unpredictability, and seeing the funny side of things as well as the serious side • being able to laugh with others including his family, friends, and acquaintances
Personal Agency, Reflection and Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a sense of personal agency and being in control of his life by having choices and making decisions • having the capacity for self-reflection and acceptance • acceptance—preserves his energy and dignity • accepting things he can't change • self-acceptance is playing a larger role in his life • not being disappointed because he can no longer do some of the activities he loves to the extent he was able to when he was younger which frees himself from self-criticism and feeling down • the ability to accept others as they are, not necessarily to forgive them, and to understand their "failures or flaws" • not holding grudges • letting go of unreasonable expectations for others means he has had few disappointments in his life regarding others • doesn't waste his time and energy worrying and ruminating on things he can't change • reflecting on life, especially his own life • following the values and principles that he has always held dear including taking the necessary actions to create the life he valued and wanted • proactive • setting goals and taking the necessary steps to achieve these goals • having a positive attitude • views others through a positive lens which supports him in feeling hopeful about the present and the future • tries his best to 'get along with people' • build some bridges with ruptured relationships and try to repair them if possible • strives to do the right thing under every unique circumstance, but acknowledges he has made mistakes • informed and thoughtful decision-making means he doesn't live with guilt

Table I.6 John (82 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a purpose and living a worthwhile life • helping and supporting people to live their lives to the fullest, something he himself has aspired to • living somewhat vicariously through his wife's exciting career • making things happen for others • a major part of John's purpose and reason for living and something he has always wanted is being a father • extremely generative—cares for and supports and helps the younger generations • significant male role model for some of his grandchildren • seeing his grandchildren "emerge," "grow up" and "become confident" • knowing that he has contributed to their success • derives a great deal of life satisfaction and purpose being an important part of his daughters' and grandchildren's lives • comforted knowing that if the time ever comes when he needs their support, they will be there for him • always gave his best to anything he attempted • seeing the end result of something he has personally strived for or something he has played a significant role in • knowing that his efforts have made a positive difference in his life and the lives of younger generations • "a person of his word," someone who can be trusted to "come through" for others and someone they can always "turn to" when they need help • looking forward to everyday because he "treasures" every day • a life filled with enjoyable things to look forward to • having fun • ability to plan • "everyday has to have something in it for me" • passion is hiking • "enjoy life; it's a short trip," time passes very quickly, "make the most of everyday" • does things he values and wants to do • having very few regrets by living fully everyday to the best of his ability
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal and social responsibility • takes responsibility for his own health • demonstrates social responsibility through volunteering and giving of himself and showing kindness and imparting his knowledge and wisdom to boys and adolescents • very humble about the importance of his role as a volunteer • making a difference in the lives of other children beyond his own family members and this further solidifies his belief that there is "some significance in his being here" • a giving person
Not Taking Things for Granted, Loss and Accepting Inevitable Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not taking things for granted and feeling fortunate for his life • having an "appreciative disposition" • loss of loved ones is a lifelong theme • ability to come to terms with and accept not only that loss is an inevitable part of life but also that changes are tied to loss • grateful for good genes, good health and abundant energy • proactive and compensating • needs to be diligent about dealing with what is happening to his body as he ages • continues to view life as having challenges rather than problems

Table I.6 John (82 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Role Models, Guiding Lights and Wonderful Memories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having significant role models and “guiding lights” • “women have always been the most important part of my life” • his grandmother modelled what it meant to deal with adversity while still retaining a sense of joyfulness and humour • consciously made the decision to devote his life to his family thereby creating wonderful memories for himself as well as for them • importance of familial connection and support • John’s mother, grandmother and aunt guided him and modelled the ethic of caring for and looking after others and showed him how to live hopefully • John’s wife, daughters and partner have also been “guiding lights” for him and continue to inspire him to practice the values he learned growing up

Table I.7 Clarence (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a close, loyal, and loving relationship with his wife • having raised two sons together with his wife • shared quality time with their grandchildren • having close, caring and supportive relationships with his children and grandchildren and great grandchild • taking over his wife’s role for keeping the family unit close • comforting as an older adult to know that he has a strong and caring connection with his siblings and extended family • importance of a close ‘family unit’ • completely self-reliant and takes great pride in that • having a social life • “chemistry he has with a woman is very important” • derives excitement and pleasure from being with a woman • having a relationship with a woman and sharing time, affection, ideas and opinions is important
Lifelong Learning , Education and Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning and education, both formally and informally • keen and curious mind • keeping mentally active • “very inquisitive” • believes his career was crucial to his ability to live a vital life currently • passion, dynamism , and love of accomplishment and achievement • “I dedicated, almost in a selfish way, my life to attaining those goals

Table I.7 Clarence (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Keeping Busy and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kept very busy with his extremely demanding career and his family • lots of enthusiasm which permeates everything he does • importance of lifelong good health • maintaining his keen mind and being interested in everything around him • engaged and interested in diverse activities • believes in being fit and used to run regularly and now walks every morning • activities challenge him to risk, study, learn, understand and become competent • “I have an interest in an awful lot of things!” • thrived on being a risk taker and says he has no “fear” of challenging experiences or activities • at age 62 years he realized a lifelong dream of learning to fly • “I’m very proud of that accomplishment” • being able to achieve a dream he had since childhood, a dream that required dedication, competence, acute physical skills, enduring long hours of training and guts • the importance of paying attention to other points of view and learning from others • “I’m fascinated by everything that goes on” • “I just live my life” • develop a keen interest in everything happening around them • “get out and go to things and see things and think about things” • be engaged in activities, have interests, challenge themselves to do difficult things and enjoy what they are doing and have fun

Table I.7 Clarence (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Embracing Change and Coping with Life's Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying on and coping with life's losses and challenges • dealt with them [challenges] with immediacy and competence always aware of the vision he had for his company • he has always thrived on both being challenged and challenging himself • accepting what could not be changed, embracing what could be changed, and adapting • adapting his lifelong dream of "adventurous travelling" • reinvented his retirement plans • "very involved" studying healthy cooking • pride in doing a good job and satisfying both himself and others • balances welcoming change and adapting with maintaining a routine • having a regimen helps him cope with stress, get jobs done and maintain a healthy lifestyle • challenges inherent in no longer having a notable career • "a loss of prestige" • "surprised and shocked" how difficult retiring was • being open to change and welcoming new experiences • "welcomes the opportunity to try different things" • coped with significant personal challenges after retiring by becoming engaged in activities that were new to him, studying them, and feeling pride in learning to do them well • simplifying his life • being proactive • "what a lesson I learned! Less is better! Man did that ever simplify our lives." • simplification "gives me time to do things" • "I get on with my life because I do adapt to new things!" • "I'm going to go ahead and live my life...as far as living my life, nothing's changed." • decided to carry on and live his life as fully as he can accepting that there may be some "curtailment" to his travelling. • building cabin on isolated island • embracing change, welcoming new experiences wholeheartedly, living fully in the moment and having a wealth of profound memories • "an appreciation for a completely different way of life" • opened his eyes to an awful lot of things
Having a Sense of Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a sense of personal agency including having choices, making decisions, problem solving and having freedom • having freedom of choice • having goals • wants to make his own decisions and act on them • recipe for living a vital life is very proactive: "face it [the problem or challenge]; decide on the action; and do it!" • "freedom to come and go!" • freedom to make all his own decisions without having to compromise with anyone else and to be able to do anything he wants to do • selective about what he chooses to do • being selective frees Clarence to do the things he wants to do when he wants to do them • feeling in control of his life • "I don't care about what other people think!" • cabin building = physical work = determination and confidence

Table I.7 Clarence (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • created a life he values and says “I enjoy my life! Love it! Wonderful, wonderful life!” • having a purpose, looking forward to things and living a worthwhile and meaningful life • looking forward to living fully every day • passionate about taking “adventuresome trips” • “taking the road less travelled” and learning and better understanding countries and their people, cultures and religions • deeper understanding • essential to observe and “see” and observing and seeing leads to understanding • “a good example,” a “role model,” and a “mentor” • being generative • provided a solid example for the younger generations to live a life with values, passion, excitement, vitality, caring for others and achieving their dreams • being generative is truly a result of “just living the life I want to!” • very important to spend time with the younger generations and gain an understanding of their perspective and by so doing, deepen and broaden his own perspective on life • “I try now to be myself and be a good example • sharing his abundant knowledge and wisdom with the younger generations • need to “mix with people, especially people that are younger.” • a lot of his vitality has been fuelled by spending time with younger people • loving nature and enjoying being in nature • wealth of profound and meaningful memories • hope that his life will continue to be a vital one in the future
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’ve always been totally responsible” • “I like responsibility! I like it! I enjoy it!” • takes a great deal of responsibility for his personal health and well-being and has continued living a healthy lifestyle • being healthy • “principle” he lives by: “not to live to be 120, but to live well and be able to do anything I want as far as my health is concerned in the years that I’ve got left.” • practices self-discipline • showed integrity • gives of himself to his family and is “the champion of the family” • showed social responsibility in caring about his employees—“I did care a lot about the employees. I really did” • to the best of his ability Clarence committed himself to improving the well-being of his employees • having no regrets regarding his responsibility to his employees

Table I.7 Clarence (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Feeling Fortunate, Not Taking Things for Granted, Loss, and Accepting Inevitable Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feels very fortunate for the life he has, past and present • doesn't take things for granted • feels grateful and very blessed and "so lucky" for the many experiences, opportunities and people throughout his life • "still likes the excitement of doing things." • adequate finances and financial freedom to pursue the lifestyle he continues to presently enjoy • being well off and not having to worry about not having enough money • some loss associated with physical changes • has come to accept the physical changes he endures due to aging • "goes with the flow" • accepting that there may be some limitations to his participation • "to face up" to both the losses and the changes wrought by them • views death as a part of life • while Clarence has thought about his age and mortality, he certainly doesn't dwell on it
Belief in Self and Self-Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unfailing belief in himself and his ability to set and accomplish goals and ultimately realize his dreams • setting goals, acting on them, giving his best effort and ultimately accomplishing his goals • always had a nature that was "a bit driven" • once he made a decision he always tried his best to follow through and put forth the best effort possible • proud of himself and his accomplishments • having a vision for himself and having the grit and determination to do whatever was required to eventually make his vision a reality • learned from his mistakes • lifelong belief that he could accomplish anything that he wanted to accomplish if he set his mind to it and worked hard enough • self-acceptance and self-compassion • reflecting on and learning from his mistakes • insight about himself and wisdom about life • he has come to this point in his life "feeling good about things" • he has learned to 'come to grips with his shortcomings, his strong points' and "understands who he is"

Table I.7 Clarence (81 years old)

Categories	Codes
Reflecting on Life and Knowing and Understanding Oneself on a Deeper Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reflected deeply on his life and come to know and understand himself on a deeper level believes he has gained a deeper understanding of life, of people and of change strived to understand “how people are changing, how they’re thinking, what is going on in their lives desire for reflection and understanding by seeking to understand others, Clarence comes to know and understand himself on a much deeper level: “I try and understand myself. Who I am” “I’m very comfortable in my skin” views his life as multifaceted all of these facets contributed to his rich life experience and provided him with the necessary strength to live a vital life in the face of all the challenges he faced life experience and living and learning fully in each facet of his life “looks back on his life” and “just thinks about his life” “I think I’m selfish” “I just simply do what I want to the exclusion of almost anything else”
Having a Positive Attitude and Having Fun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> having a positive attitude a well-developed sense of humour “a positive outlook” “to look forward to things and get excited about things and get involved thinking about things” he doesn’t envy anyone does not view himself as old ability to have fun “I like my life! I like me!”

Table I.8 Henry (85 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Adequate Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> having adequate finances financial security and freedom to maintain his lifestyle and do the things he enjoys and finds fun being “comfortable” financially and not having to worry about having enough money
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sharing himself with others having a close, companionable, and loving relationship with his wife he and his wife are “good friends” and companions at this stage in their life having a close, caring and supportive relationship with his children and grandchildren having a satisfying social life recognizing his need to be engaged with others engaging with others who are involved in the activities that he enjoys doing, discussing things with them, at times, just “nattering” away with others having both longer term friendships and developing new acquaintances and friendships to continue to have a meaningful social life he needs to meet new people and develop new acquaintances and friendships he is someone who listens to others and learns from them

Table 1.8 Henry (85 years old)

Categories	Codes
Lifelong Learning and Education and Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning and education, both formal and informal • music has been a profound influence • having to “learn all these things [medical advances] as the years went by” • stayed abreast of new happenings in medicine and “kept his practice up to date” • continued learning also “kept his mind going” • currently Henry attends a discussion group at UBC • “I try to keep my mind active through these discussions”
Keeping Busy and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping active • a good work ethic, kept very busy with career, enjoyed volunteering and had and continues to have diverse interests • adapting and changing and reinventing part of his life—interested and busy doing enjoyable and at times, challenging activities • “I had nothing to do so I started developing a whole lot of hobbies” • it is only by being actively involved in living that “one can keep sane and healthy • needs to continue to balance his interests and activities so they allow for mental, physical, and spiritual engagement • compensates by continuing with activities like hiking and cycling that he can still do at 85 years of age, albeit at a slower pace, and developing new interests and activities that “keep himself busy,” “amused,” and provide meaning in his life • diverse routine of activities and interests • not only engaging in old and new interests and activities in later adulthood but also enjoying them • Renaissance man • enjoys being open to, and embracing new experiences and living in the moment • to experience wonderment, joy and spontaneity • lives enthusiastically • figuring out things • powers of observation and his deepest respect and love of nature • “if you don’t use it, you lose it” • proactive
Carrying On and Coping with Life’s Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not taking himself too seriously • ability to “carry on” and see things through in the face of life’s challenges • hopeful for the future and optimistic • as well as carrying on, acknowledging that “there are always challenges,” throughout life • Henry’s deep spirituality and Christianity • having good health and taking care of his health, and being fit and active • challenges inherent in getting places • psychologically healthy • has to work things out ahead of time • planning, problem-solving, and thinking things through ahead of time • perseverance and determination • being flexible and open to changing his plans • importance of making sure that he has more than one plan available to him • taking more time to think things through = “in control” • taking initiative and being proactive • continued initiative taking evident by his involvement in many activities and his desire to make things happen by being the one to keep in touch with people who share his interests and encourage them to remain involved with him • having a sense of humour and being able not to take himself too seriously • hope in his life, which is both life affirming and cause for optimism • hope for the future and lives his life with optimism

Table I.8 Henry (85 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Sense of Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a sense of personal agency including having choices, making decisions and being independent • feeling he is in control of his life • empowering himself by continuing to take control of his life and acknowledging that he has choices and options at the mid-point of his ninth decade • sustaining an independent life • how difficult it would be for him to live a life without choices • he still has choices and can make decisions and learn new activities which would sustain his mental alertness and social involvement
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enjoying life • having goals • living a purposeful and worthwhile life is “the whole point of being” • religion and spirituality are critical themes • in striving to be a good Christian, “I try to do worthwhile things” • “it’s probably the religion that gives me the will to live and to strive” • to worship God and love your neighbour is the motive for everything one does” • developing a spiritual life in one’s 50’s and 60’s is also important for having a vital life when one is in his or her older years • helping people and making their lives better • joy and satisfaction that he got “out of being able to help people” • 18 years as a mentor of children and youth • 25 years volunteering in a children’s summer camp • at 70 years of age he began volunteering at a hospital in Haiti • knowing that he was still able to be involved in making people’s lives better • living a “useful” and productive life when he was working and volunteering • Henry no longer believes that his life is as useful or as worthwhile • yearning to continue, from his perspective, to be “useful” and to live a worthwhile life by “helping” other people • having something to look forward to is a lifelong theme • music has played a meaningful and pivotal role throughout his life and continues to be something that he looks forward to • having “fun” and “living vitally when he is involved in playing music” • “playing the cello has been my lifelong chief hobby” • “there’s always possibilities”

Table I.8 Henry (85 years old)

Categories	Codes
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal and social responsibility and having an ethic of caring • being a Christian • remembered for having made a positive impact on the lives of so many people through his professionalism, caring attitude, teaching and mentoring of young people and this remembrance is important to Henry • taking care of, enjoying, and learning from the younger generations • generative • being a mentor “was probably the best thing I did as far as volunteer work” • broadening his perspective • “I got to see things from a different point of view” • still able to be generative to younger generations (grandchildren) • “great fun” to be in contact with the younger generations, because he is both learning from them and learning to understand them • knowing and understanding how the world is different for young people today • still volunteers • taking personal responsibility is outweighing taking social responsibility • maintain his physical health • personal obligations that he needs to see through • responsibility to be conscientious • being conscientious motivates and propels him to “get” things “done” • has begun to take more and more responsibility at home which is new • is responsible for being a caretaker to his wife • a giving person
Not Taking Things for Granted, Feeling Grateful, Accepting Inevitable Changes and Adapting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not take his life or the things in it for granted • he feels fortunate and grateful for life, the life he has had in the past and the one he has now • reflection/self-reflection • he accepts that at his age he might not live long enough to see his next anniversary • people should not take life for granted and should have a balanced mental, physical and spiritual life • recognized and accepted that there are limitations involved with aging • losses and limitations • proactive in replacing activities that are dependent on having more physical strength with ones that are more doable • his strength and endurance have decreased • “I just accepted as one of those things to do with aging and I had to go on a different track” • accepting and adapting to physical limitations due to aging • decreasing strength and stamina • he has become more selective • compensated for his decreasing strength, stamina and endurance • replacing what he can no longer do with activities he can do or spending more time on activities that have been lifelong and are still doable • flexible and adapts to his changing circumstances • travel, something he has enjoyed throughout his life and something he believes enriched his life and contributed to his life being a vital one • compensated somewhat for his lack of overseas travel by “living vicariously” • learning about other places like Machu Pichu in Peru “second hand” • acknowledging that illness, disability and loss are possibilities and death is inevitable, but not dwelling on his own mortality • loss of career and volunteering with younger people and mentoring them

Table I.8 Henry (85 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Good Memories and Reliving Meaningful Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having good memories that enable Henry to relive meaningful and valued experiences and the valued life he created for himself

Table I.9 Margarita (76 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having Adequate Financial Means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having adequate financial means • has less financial security now • has to think about what she wants to buy and ask herself if she really needs it • she has “had to cut back” • learned to adapt to not having the same financial resources she had when she was working • learned that she has to be “more in control” of her finances in order to live the lifestyle she lives currently and do a lot of the things she enjoys doing • “I just adjust to the money” • having peace of mind financially and not having to worry • being selective when it comes to what she does and does not spend her money on
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having satisfying relationships • strength for living vitally from her nature—sharer and not a loner • finds purpose and meaning in her life when she “connects” with others • reaching out to others, connecting with them and sharing herself • having a sharing, close and loving relationship with her family [siblings] • critical to “have sisters to share my life with right now” • sharing memories • “family important for reminiscing” and good memories • being able to “laugh” • receiving support is “where friends come in” • close engagement with friends • socializing is important • outgoing – “social butterfly” • celebrates “important occasions” with friends • giving of herself to her friends and providing support for her friends and helping them any way she can • reaching out and sharing with her friends • has come to terms with not having a life partner • be open to having a partner to share her life with • always enjoyed engaging socially with the opposite sex • continue to be aware of and experience her sense of womanhood • feels she is attractive • feeling attractive engaging with opposite sex socially, and feeling good about her femininity
Lifelong Learning and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning and education, whether formal or informal • a sense of curiosity about the world, past and present • views education and learning on a much broader scale than just formal schooling • maintaining mental acuity • keeping her mind stimulated by keeping connected to current events

Table I.9 Margarita (76 years old)

Categories	Codes
Keeping Busy and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping busy and involved by having, developing and pursuing interests • along with good health for being vital is keeping active • feeling and thinking young • priority to keep her “body busy” through involvement in outdoor/indoor activities and the gym • a good work ethic • participating in an activity she enjoys every day – diverse activities/interests • having a keen interest and curiosity about the world and life both close and far away • welcomes interests such as politics that are challenging and more difficult and attends to them with best effort • a lot of determination • doesn’t back down from doing things that are difficult • perseveres and sees things through • seeking to understand politics and being avidly engaged • tries to make meaning of what is happening in the world • listening to and being interested in others, showing humility, being open to other people’s experiences, trying to understand what’s happening worldwide and broadening her perspectives on life • “good health allows me to participate in the activities that I enjoy” • “if I wasn’t healthy I don’t think I would have a vital life” • metaphor = “health” • understanding, especially self-understanding • interested in what’s going on in the world
Carrying On and Coping With Life’s Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying on and coping with life’s challenges • believing in god and having faith • her belief in God and prayer • does not give up; she is determined to always keep trying when challenges arise • having courage • courage, belief in herself, and risk-taking • sense of adventure and risk-taking • more cautious about what she challenges herself to do now • practices self-talk • proactive • learning to cope from a young age • strength to confront her fears and take necessary action • the ability to cope has always been part of her nature • the biggest challenge to her vital life would be if she were to get really ill

Table I.9 Margarita (76 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Sense of Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being able to have choices and make decisions • control over her life and the choices she makes—she is in the driver’s seat of her life’s journey • steering her own destiny by making choices is meaningful because it makes her happy • being proactive and believing she is ultimately the creator of her rich, meaningful and active life • “brings vitality into her life” • has always had to work at making her life a vital one • maintains good emotional and mental health • having more balance in her life • to balance being more kind with being more selective • being a kind person • becoming more impatient has happened with age • learned to listen to her impatience • being more selective about whom she chooses to socialize with • more self-reflective and recognizes and trusts that negative feelings she is having may indicate she needs to be more discerning with people and these negative feelings need to be dealt with quickly • finding a balance between playing the “social butterfly” role and taking more time to be alone to relax and reflect • this balance between social connection and time to self • standing up for herself and trying something else when what she is doing is “obviously not working” • she puts greater thought into what she will say and acts more diplomatically • being diplomatic
Having a Purpose, Looking Forward to Things and Living a Worthwhile Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • believing she is living a purposeful and worthwhile life • “not wishing to die” • wanting to get up each morning looking forward to life, and living each and every day to the best of her ability in the moment • having goals and/or dreams ensure she looks forward to every day optimistically • having a dream inspires her youthful heart • purpose in life was to travel • “wanted to explore other parts of the world” • desire for adventure and exploring • creates happiness in her life through planning - creates the life she values • “to me life is all about being happy” • being contented • being comfortable • being born with a happy nature and enjoying life and having fun • makes people laugh • “her nature” to love to laugh • having a wonderful sense of humour, being able to laugh at herself and others • making someone else laugh, lifting their spirits by “making them feel good” • laughter is a powerful way in which Margarita ensures that both her emotional and physical health is nurtured • being happy motivates Margarita to make plans • had to adjust or adapt to a different routine • planning and having a daily routine motivates Margarita to get out and be a part of the world • you have to plan your life as if you’re going to continue to be young • she also has “to be realistic and realize that she can’t plan everything—“more and more she balances making larger plans with making smaller plans with just waiting for things to happen” • having something she is passionate about = playing tennis = passion for tennis

Table I.9 Margarita (76 years old)

Categories	Codes
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal responsibility • continues currently to live a very independent life • “sometimes” wishes she didn’t have to be so responsible and so independent • she would “like to share” her responsibility with someone • being responsible and independent is important • social responsibility - volunteering
Feeling Fortunate and Not Taking Things for Granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • never taken things for granted and feels very lucky and fortunate for many things in her life • “living somewhere comfortable” • grateful for having good health throughout her life • does not dwell on possibility she may one day not have as good health • is aware of and has reflected on her own mortality but doesn’t linger on it • having enthusiasm for life • taking care of their health [people in their 50’s and 60’s]
Loss, Inevitable Changes, Acceptance and Adapting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • always lived a vital life • loss of career = “planning a whole new life” • loss of a marriage/relationship • acceptance • she carries on and continues to do whatever is necessary • learning to accept what she cannot change about life and other people and that she is changing and developing and growing • acceptance of other people • being more accepting of whatever life brings in order to be hopeful, look forward to things, and be happier • accept reality of being retired and adapt to retirement by making changes and reinventing her life quite significantly • physical losses and changes associated with aging and has adapted to a life which doesn’t include some of the activities she used to do • more balance in Margarita’s life • still wants to accomplish things, but not as intensely driven to do so as when younger

Table I.10 Helen (72 years old)

Categories	Codes
The Importance of Financial Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a solid financial foundation in later adulthood • having adequate finances means not having to worry about enough finances • thought about [how to have enough financial security], made choices, planned and saved • having options to do the things she enjoys due to having adequate finances • “fairly generous” and “donates to charities”

Table L.10 Helen (72 years old)

Categories	Codes
The Importance of Satisfying Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having close, caring and supportive relationships with the members of her family • credits her husband, “a real character,” with being instrumental in supporting her vital life • Helen’s three children have always been very important to her ability to life and vital and fulfilled life • the contentment she derives from her children and grandchildren and the closeness they share are a significant source of her happiness and vitality • commitment to family and familial reciprocity • having a rich and meaningful social life, filled with friendships • it is her “nature” to enjoy being with people, to “do a lot together,” to “share a lot together,” and to maintain long term, positive friendships • knowing that she matters to her friends
Lifelong Learning , Education and Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal and informal learning and education • career as a nurse meaningful and fulfilling • she “loves” has always been passionate about, considers very educational and finds as “interesting” and exciting currently as in the past—travelling • being open to continuing to learn new things
Keeping Active, Busy, and Involved by Having, Developing and Pursuing Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being active and actively engaged in living life is a critical component of Helen’s living a fulfilled, meaningful, and vital life • keen interest in the world and its people • she is a “doer” and she has always challenged herself to take risks and to try different things • “I guess most of my life actually, I’ve been active” • the ways in which she lives actively are “more diverse now” • being “curious” drives her desire to develop interests • having interests and keeping active mentally and physically • be willing to be continually open to trying new and more challenging activities • reach out and go to their community centers to meet other people and find something they are interested in and develop that interest • whatever a person has an interest in or thinks they might have an interest in should be pursued, learned and developed • taking on new activities, some of which are difficult and challenging • healthy heart group weekly

Table I.10 Helen (72 years old)

Categories	Codes
Carrying On, Coping with Life's Challenges, and Climbing Over the Hurdles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "life hasn't been easy all the time, but I've managed to climb over the hurdles" • having religious faith • carrying on and coping with life's challenges • a lot of responsibility • "we were left to do it all" • "I'm pretty tolerant" • communicate with people and respond rather than react to challenging situations • having good communication skills • tied closely to being tolerant and having good communication skills is ability to reflect on things and not become angry in difficult situations • "avoids the negatives and lives life positively and joyfully...endeavouring not to criticize people" • always viewed herself as a positive and optimistic person • developed a strong work ethic, giving her best effort and self-discipline • working hard and being active and self-discipline are themes that continued to evolve through her training and career as a nurse • not only was she trained to work hard and do a good job, but "I think it gave me a good background to know right from wrong," a lifetime value • have peace of mind • ever indomitable • proactive and actively changing that which is in her control • "placid" = acceptance now • adapting • not stressing or worrying about what she considers to be "insignificant" things • feels "comfortable" and "at ease" and doesn't tend to "fuss" • copes with life's problems from a very strong and grounded place, with few regrets and enough energy to think things through and make well-informed decisions • being proactive • getting up and getting going • "self-talk" • "making the most" of life and carrying on through the good times and the bad times • perseverance and determination and tenacity • having humour in her life and having a sense of humour or "making a little humorous"

Table I.10 Helen (72 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Sense of Personal Agency, Self-Knowing and Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need for personal agency and control over her life including having choices and “making decisions for herself” • setting goals for herself (piano playing) • “just putting up with my husband” and “defending myself” • standing up for herself—something she has challenged herself to do more and more in later adulthood • “intervening on behalf of the vulnerable and living courageously • has the courage to stand up for her convictions and values and is willing to speak out against something that is wrong when it involves others • “knowing herself” • being comfortable with herself • having a philosophy or attitude of “acceptance” becomes more important as she ages • being accepting = “not worrying” which means she has less stress and more calm in her day-to-day life • practicing acceptance and letting go • “just being there” • reaching out , “being supportive” and “expressing love” • cannot control what other adults will do but can have control of her own life • new learning: before Helen tended to “intervene” and try to “change” the situation when she believed something to be “wrong”

Table I.10 Helen (72 years old)

Categories	Codes
Having a Purpose, Living a Worthwhile Life and Looking Forward to Things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I guess it [vital] means, a vitality. It’s an exuberance! There’s a joy! There’s a living. There’s a positive” • “the older I get, the more I am living and exuberant, energetic, joyful and positive life—a vital life” • creator of a life that is meaningful, fulfilling and one she values • strict upbringing and training as a nurse provided the foundation for a worthwhile, meaningful, and valued life • “put her priorities where they should be” – working hard, caring for others and protecting the vulnerable, or being very thrifty” means she “can perpetuate the good” which ensures she feels “good in herself” • having a strong and meaningful belief or values system • small rebellion when nursing became unionized—including her strength of character through living her values and having a fighting spirit • “so it’s a bit of a rebel in me maybe...I insist on doing a good job!” • making a difference, doing her best to either right a wrong or make sure a wrong doesn’t continue to happen, taking action, and speaking up • doing a good job and enjoying it • seeing things through • persist or persevere at her endeavours • perseverance and determination • persevering with challenging endeavours and getting better • being generative including being a role model to younger generations • spending time with her grandchildren and being actively involved in their lives doing things with them and modeling the importance of being engaged in activities • being a mentor to her grandchildren and learning from them • importance of getting “involved with people “and having fun • having a “good relationship and rapport “with the younger people in her life because she is living in the moment • making a positive difference in her grandchildren’s lives and passing on her knowledge to them • having “a dream,” having something to look forward to, seeing things through and living her passions including travelling • created meaningful memories through work, family, volunteering and travelling
Taking Personal and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking personal and social responsibility and having an ethic of caring • sense of personal and social responsibility well-balanced • one of her lifelong goals has been and continues to be “to be of service to people by helping them” • feeling that she is making a positive difference in people’s lives • active participation in community building • dedication, hard work, and being a conscientious and responsible person “builds up trust in other people” • being an ethical and dependable person—someone who can be counted on • knowing that people have “confidence” in her • giving of herself, making a difference in people’s lives, and seeing positive results and being appreciated for her efforts • volunteers her time—Alzheimer’s group (for partners of people who have Alzheimer’s) • reaching out and reciprocity • “if I can share” • having “faith” and is a critical factor in supporting her to live meaningfully and vitally • giving of herself and donating to charity

Table I.10 Helen (72 years old)

Categories	Codes
Not Taking Things for Granted, Feeling Grateful and Blessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feels very blessed for the life she has and does not take her life for granted • she feels that she has “so much to be thankful for.” • “very blessed” • “how fortunate I am...I’ve been blessed in so many ways. I have a tremendous group of friends that I am very, very blessed with...so I feel very luck” • good health the most important factor • lifelong good health as a “blessing” • the importance of taking responsibility for one’s physical health early on • self-discipline • does not take her continued good fortune for granted • lives life she believes is active, meaningful, purposeful, worthwhile, joyful and very vital • always had a lot of energy throughout her life • actively expresses her gratitude to others • expressed gratitude for all her more difficult experiences reflecting that they have “helped build my character”
Embracing New Experiences and Living in the Moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking forward to fulfilling her dreams and being open to the many experiences she will continue to engage in and the new ones she will discover, some which challenge her abilities and comfort zone • capacity to be spontaneous and live life in the moment • self-reflective • love of nature [gardening] and communicating with others, sharing, learning and teaching • “I love nature” • ability to experience nature in the moment and feel appreciation for it • “I get a joy out of being” in nature and a “sense of freedom” • in nature she meditates on how fortunate she is • living in the moment and having a strong sense of her womanhood • “I enjoy flirting with the opposite sex” • “treadmill:” fully embrace the paths that open to her including savouring every moment, having fun laughing, risking, reflecting, keeping going, no matter what, and never being afraid of trying things that might appear scary or daunting or difficult • being courageous enough to dance through life • making the effort to learn something new, risk taking, stretching her comfort zone, and connecting with people thriving in different life circumstances than hers