



The Paradigm Shifts
COACHING GROUP



Aging Like a
Guru

By Dr. Rosie Kuhn

Aging Like A Guru...

Who Me?

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to all human beings. We are all aging gurus.

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Introduction

Aging – Who Me?

If you are old enough to be reading this book, you are old enough to understand that you have been participating in the aging process well before your little feet landed on the planet. You experienced the process of aging when you lost your first teeth around the age of six. Six years later, you began to develop muscle, breasts, pubic hair, and growth. Invisible hormones began to create sensations that were way beyond your ability to control. For many of us, we looked forward to these changes. For others, not so much!

In the mid-thirties and forties, you begin to notice a wrinkle or two, and grey hair begins to pop up in the most peculiar places. Perhaps the biological clock is ticking, pressing upon you the need to get started with baby-making, if you haven't already.

In the late forties and into your fifties, your skin begins to loosen and get crepe-y. Boobs sag - and so does everything else. Erections are more difficult, and so is peeing. Little by little you experience physical changes that you heard were coming, but always believed it would never happen to you. Who me?

I recently gave a talk at the Orcas Island Senior Center regarding aging and independence. In that hour and a half, those who attended began to share what it was really like inside themselves, and how they were participating - willingly or not, in the process of aging. No one minced words or used languaging that lightens the reality that life, as we knew it, had changed dramatically, and that there is no way out of this aging process!

What was shared was the degree of denial that many of us live in: the kind of denial that robs us of freedom of choice. What was also shared was the degree to which so many of us isolate ourselves, because we believe that we are the only ones going through the emotional upheavals of the process of aging.

When we look around at how others are being with aging, it appears as if everyone else has a handle it. One person offered to the group: "I'm afraid that if I share what aging is really like for me, people will decide there is something definitely wrong with me. So I isolate. I don't want people to see me as old and decrepit. I figure I'll fake it till I make it!"

So, consider every individual - especially women in their early adulthood (30's and 40's), who utilize plastic surgery to avoid and distract themselves from the natural progression and evolution of their being, physical and otherwise. Each of us, in our own way, is attempting to fake it till they make it. They want to hold at bay the inevitable annihilation of the "ME" we imagine ourselves to be. But, who are we really? Perhaps we are already who we are pretending to be? How can we know unless we do a little exploring of who is inside this soon-to-be, if not already, bag of bones?

With aging, regardless of which stage of life we are talking about, there is a metamorphosis process that is taking place. In truth, it scares the Bejeesus out of each and every one of us. Why? Because we don't know how to do this thing called life. We would rather practice tried-and-true DENIAL: Don't Even Know I Am Lying. Who wants to admit to themselves, or to anyone else, the degree to which they feel powerless and helpless about the changes occurring to them and in them? Um, like, no one!

Johnny Depp says "I don't know how to be a grownup - I've never done it before." None of us know how to do aging. Even those who consider themselves experts in the field - they too have to have their own personal and direct experience of aging, for better or worse, to truly understand and know aging.

Each of us is here for the opportunity to figure out who we are as we transition through each developmental stage of aging. You are not alone! And though, it may look as if this stage of aging isn't going to end well, the truth is that it will be what you make of it!

The other day, at a second gathering of individuals curious enough to continue the discussion on aging at the Senior Center, one of the participants declared: "It's not an adventure if you couldn't die doing it." Who is up for an adventure? Okay, most of us aren't so thrilled with the idea that death is possible when facing an adventure. However, in this particular adventure called Your Life, death is not only a possibility, it is inevitable.

What I want for each individual on the planet is to experience the fulfillment of their human-spirit. Cultivating the awareness that each of us has the capacity to empower ourselves to make that happen, well, that is a responsibility that comes with experience - through aging.

None of us will get out of here with our human suits on. It's as though we are on a business trip, here on Earth, to get the job done. Then, we get to go home. But what is the job to be done? I have no doubt that you know what's yours to do. And, well, you get to decide how you will proceed, given the tasks at hand.

Where Do We Go From Here?

What you will find within the covers of this book are short stories, narratives, and anecdotes about people and stages of their lives. Each focuses on a particular aspect of life as we age. The intention of this book is to provide a perspective and some encouragement to examine and explore who you are in the midst of this human experience, regardless of where you are in the aging process. This isn't a how-to book, per se. It is more of a how it is, and a how it can be, book.

Sure, it may seem that we are attempting to make lemonade out of lemons, but why not? We've got all the lemons in the world - maybe we can make a pie or two while we are at it!

I love the saying of John Lennon: "Everything is great in the end. If it's not great, it's not the end!" What a great reminder!

Aging like a guru requires us to get acquainted with who is inside these beautiful vehicles of life - our bodies. It requires that we see the humor and delight that travels along with us. And, to age like a guru requires the practice of seeing that, as my dad always said up until he died at age 91, it just gets better every day!

Chapter One

Is This As Good As It Gets?

Most of us expect that when we age we will decline in every way possible. We hold firm to the belief that this is the way it is supposed to be, and we blindly walk down the path of decline. But if that is the truth, why do some people actually thrive as they age? What's up with that?

Taking inventory of the Good, the Bad, the Beautiful, and the Ugly sometimes, while driving down the highway, I see old cars in pristine shape, and wonder how it is that those things still run. Obviously, somebody takes really good care of them - that's how! Someone dotes and primps on their well-oiled machine in order to keep it that way. I admire those people for their dream, their vision, and their passions – it keeps their car looking great, and it keeps them challenged and excited about life.

Our bodies are much like those cars. I think that most of us have a lot more miles available - especially since so many of our parts can be replaced. It doesn't take a lot of fine-tuning; just a bit of pedal-to-metal every once in a while, to keep the pipes from clogging up. So what keeps us in the mindset of allowing ourselves to rust out, as it were, and end up in the junk yard? Yuck, that isn't a happy thought, is it?

We would like to believe that miraculous transformation will restore us to our original luster and beauty. Sadly though, even miracles take some effort to pull off, and so most of us decide we just don't want to do it anymore.

The Mechanics Handbook

It is easier than ever these days to go onto the Internet, type in a question about aging and change, and BAZINGA! We have tons of information to sift through. Some of it provides worst-case scenarios; some of it is best-case scenarios. Are we victims of aging, or are we continually empowered to make empowering choices? Our presumption sets the stage for our experience. Our experience reinforces our presumptions, which cultivates ruts, and now we are not only victims to aging, but we are also victims to our ruts.

I Can't Get Out of My Rut - Another Presumption

You may like your rut. It's comfortable; change isn't required - just the willingness to see life within your rut as, this is as good as it gets! It's not necessarily true, it's just the truth you choose to live by and die by.

A few weeks ago, it was almost as if someone flipped the switch, and my fingers and knee joints began to hurt. "Ah, this is it," I decided. "This is the beginning of a life with arthritis. I won't be able to walk with Gracie. I'll have to" The worries and angst began to take up my day. Then, a nutritionist friend asked me if my diet had changed? I said yes, actually, and then shared with her what I was eating. She said that what I was eating was causing the inflammation which was causing the stiffness, which was causing the pain. "Stop eating so much of... and you'll probably see a huge difference in your body." She was right. In a matter of days, the pain is just about gone. It's a miracle! The only miracle here is that I chose to stop eating something that I enjoy. I stopped eating something that was causing me pain. That's not a miracle, that's just intelligence, eh?

I'm as likely as anyone to travel down the well-worn path of "truths," such as the favorite, that aging sucks. After all, I'm just a human being like everyone else. I, like everyone else, cling to the remnants of a life raft that takes me down the river of worry and fear that I'm getting older, and that that means pain and suffering. It's the best I can hope for. However, sometimes, to save yourself, you have to jump ship and swim for your life. Swimming for your life is an act of will, passion, and commitment. It takes courage to peel your grasping fingers from the rails of what you believe will save you, and surrender into the waters of faith. It might be true that either way you are going down, so only you get to decide how you want to go down.

How can we prepare for this inevitable journey of aging when it is such an individual experience? We are trained to hope for the best but expect the worst. Shifting the weight of attention from what is being taught and what we have learned, to what we know and has never been forgotten, we begin again to empower ourselves to live the life that is full of delicious richness as we embrace our aging process.

Preprogrammed Automation

While we watch the news and commercials, and just about every page on the Internet, we are bombarded by information and ads that continue to reinforce that we are just cogs in the wheel of life. Do this. Don't do that. Be afraid - be very afraid!

And, I don't know one single person who says "Hey, I want to be a cog in the wheel. I want to be led down the primrose path by the ring in my nose. I want to get all rusted out and end up in a junk yard." Yet, here we are, preprogrammed automatons, most of us doing what we think we should do, or resisting doing what we want to do. Whoopee!

Aging like a guru requires looking at how we choose to see who we are in this experience called life. We begin to notice how we choose to look at life, circumstances, and our thoughts, feelings, needs and wants, in relation to life.

Aging like a guru allows us to notice that judging ourselves and others doesn't really help us become happy and healthy. Each of us have our own way of viewing the world and living it. There is no right way, wrong way, or good or bad way. That's just the way it is!

Sometimes, all I can do is declare that aging sucks! Anguish, fear and pain nurture the suckiness of my experience. When I think of how gurus age, I imagine that they just shrug their shoulders, take a deep breath, and relax into the moment. Rather than declare that this current episode of suckiness is as good as it gets, they remind themselves that this too shall pass.

Chapter 2

If I Weren't Me

A favorite part of my job as a Life Coach is that I get to witness human beings take tiny filaments of beliefs and turn them into huge knots of limitations. They, like most of us, aren't able to hear themselves speak, nor see how their thoughts create the world around them. As their thinking partner, I hear what they themselves can't hear, and I share with them what I'm hearing so that they can make sense of the tangled knots of beliefs that stir within. After which they are at choice to choose differently.

The other most favorite part of my job is witnessing people courageously untangle those knotted up filaments of beliefs and weave them into a magnificent tapestry of fulfillment and joy.

My client Shirley is in her mid-fifties, and in our most recent session informed me, in every way but Sunday, that she would be better off being someone else, because if she was someone else, all of her circumstances would be good and easy. "If I weren't me, I wouldn't fail and I wouldn't suck at just about everything!"

Now Shirley is one of the most courageous and brilliant people I've ever had the honor to work with. Regardless of how brilliant one is, there are inherent beliefs that tie us into knots and limit our intelligence, wisdom, and the ability to see clearly enough to choose what is in the best interest for all involved.

Shirley is initiating an amazing startup company in Silicon Valley. She is also in relationship with a very challenging and dangerous horse. She isn't making progress with either the start up or the horse, and so, she sees herself as a failure. She says, "I would know what to do if I weren't me." Then, Shirley says, "What I want is to know what to do. What I want is to have the answers that would make all of this easier. Then it wouldn't be so obvious that I SUCK!"

Like most of us, Shirley looks outside of herself to see how others have successfully overcome these obstacles that are keeping her struggling with her challenges.

I'm not unfamiliar with this belief that if I weren't me life would be hugely different. So, I empathize with Shirley's dilemma. Her dilemma though, isn't whether she should put her horse down, who is not only dangerous but also lame, or whether she knows all the right answers to bring in funding for her startup. No, her dilemma is that, although she is Shirley and will always be Shirley, she can't reconcile this truth with the fact that she doesn't know how to be Shirley and be with the truths of what is.

isShe doesn't know how to be in the midst of very challenging circumstances. The truth is, no one knows how to be in very challenging circumstances!

Shirley, like the rest of us, shuns, resists or shuts down the human experience of powerlessness, hopelessness, and helplessness. She hates feeling out of control. She hates herself when she is out of control. Raise your hand if you've never felt this way! Raise your hand if you are in denial of ever having felt this way! The point is, I don't know a single person that hasn't been, or isn't currently in Shirley's dilemma: how do I be me while in the midst of such deep personal challenges?

Shirley is facing a hugely common occurrence of being human: feeling powerless, helpless, and hopeless - AKA, feeling out of control. And, my experience is that most of us will do everything possible to avoid feeling out of control. We would rather blame, shame, hate and rage against ourselves than to accept that, due to the fact that we are human, we can't always know what to do, and we can't always know how to do what needs to be done. Sometimes life just sucks, and there is no way around it.

The statement "If I weren't me..." creates a type of insanity. Yes, it's true that if I weren't me I'd be somebody else. For some reason though, we believe that being someone else would mean we wouldn't have problems. Well, the truth is, you wouldn't perhaps have these problems, but you would definitely be facing other problems and dilemmas that would be just as challenging.

The constant barrage of challenges that are Shirley's, in this moment, are sourced in her core belief that being Shirley isn't enough - that she isn't enough. As she and I uncover this deep truth, Shirley sobs uncontrollably. In these deep moments of grief, she begins to reclaim herself. She sees that, over and over again, she has thrown herself under the bus: she denies her own experience of being powerless and helpless, and in doing so casts aside her own knowing and wisdom, and focuses on what other people are telling her to do.

As we grow, develop, unfold, and yes, age, we increase our capacity to listen with intelligence to what is being said inside our heads and inside our hearts. Aging gives us the opportunity to work out the truths of who we are and who we are not; we can see limiting beliefs and how they affect us. It's easier to see this in other people, and, quite often, we say "I'm glad I'm not her. I'm glad I'm not him. In this moment, I'm glad I'm me!"

No one likes facing the unknown. No one likes not knowing what to do. No one likes feeling vulnerable within those life circumstances that wring us of every shred of

osmartness, and right-action. These moments are the big Fat Be-With's oflife, within which we surrender our "if only's," and our "what Iwant is", and be with what is - the Isness of Is.

Admitting that we are powerless over our circumstance and over people, places, and things, empowers us to surrender to the truth of the moment, which, for Shirley is that It Sucks! The truth isn't that Shirley sucks as a human being; the truth is that her circumstance suck. She now gets to be with the Big Fat Be With of being Shirley. And, inevitably, she will know what to do, she will do it, and she will feel good about herself when all is said and done. That's what happens. Eventually we realize that we have the capacity to accept what we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and we have the wisdom to know the difference. Yes, this is the Serenity Prayer.

In the midst of our human challenges, even the most horrendous ones, we can look to anyone around us and know, without a doubt, that they too know what it's like to be in sucky circumstances. We are all so courageous. And at the same time, we are so afraid of discovering where our courage will take us. Wha-hoooo!

Aging like a guru allows us to feel the true human experience of what it is like to be in despairing situations. We feel all of what goes on within the Big Fat Be With, denying nothing of this deep experience that can only be experienced by us, individually.

Aging like a guru also allows each of us to inevitably choose with gladness to choose to be "me." In so doing, we begin to respect and honor the "me" that has gone through enormous amounts of adventures, has struggled, survived, and now has the capacity for greater wisdom and a greater capacity for happiness.

There comes a moment for each of us as we step into our guru-ness when we have access to being able to celebrate choosing to be exactly who we already are.

Chapter 3

The Aging Dreamer - The Ageless Dreamer

"There are literally no limits to what you may now choose to experience within the context of this physical form.... One must now take total responsibility for the focused intent that underlies one's choices." (Oneness, p.299)

As I read these words from my favorite book, Oneness, I ask myself the question - What do people who are aging dream and imagine? What do I dream and imagine? Or, have I given up believing in dreams; that I'm too old to have my dreams come true?

Dreaming and imagining are essential components of our human psyche. At every age, through stories, music, imagination and play, we cultivate the capacity to make believe: we make our believings into reality. We imagine ourselves as heroes and bad guys. We imagine ourselves as royalty ruling over our domains. We dream of being super-powered people, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Never do we dream of being depressed pathetic losers.

Dreaming, imagining, and fantasizing utilizes and strengthens our powers to create. Within our dreams we are inspired to make things happen. If you look around at everything that has been made by humans, it is all born out of creation, which is born out of imagining and dreaming. Science, music, philosophy, medicine... all of it comes from dreaming and imagining.

Quite often we stop dreaming and creating when something or someone tells us we can't make our dreams come true. We lose faith, and we lose trust in ourselves. We begin to think small and play small, and inevitably depression sets in; for after all, depression is what is left when we take away our powers to be the fullest expression of our essential selves.

My client Randall, when he was 13 years old, dreamed and imagined himself being a hugely successful musician. He had all the details worked out and he knew, without a doubt, that he would make his dream come true.

When he shared his dream with his dad, he was shattered by his father's ridicule and insults. Randall was told in no uncertain terms that the life of a musician wasn't something to strive for. His father told him to give up the dream. And, so he did.

Randall, being a creative person, found other outlets for his dreams and creativity, but, now in his 60's, he realizes the dream of singing and playing music has always been with him. The dream and the dreamer never died.

For decades, Randall put off allowing himself to even know his full capacity of making his dream come true. Today, he is beginning to put some muscle behind his intention, and has taken up a practice that will ultimately bring about the fulfillment of his dream. The most important part of this practice is taking full responsibility for the degree to which he will make it happen!

Some people would say - as Randall says himself, that it's too late, he doesn't have the resources, the time, or the sex appeal of youth, and that he will never know whether he would have been successful at fulfilling the dream of his childhood. Randall actually knows nothing about what's possible, and to a huge degree, it truly doesn't matter. What matters is that his dream wants expression in the real world, and Randall is committed to making that happen.

Whereas, in young children, there are no limits to our super-powers, as we progress and age, our imaginings become more logical and pragmatic. In our teens, we consider careers, schools, traveling, education, relationships, and what's going to make the most money. We create within imposed limits of possibility. We begin to make-believe based on what the "real world" reflects is possible and what is important. Our dreams begin to be shaped by what other people think and want, what's possible, affordable, and doable. We stop believing that everything, and I do mean everything, is possible.

In our 20's, 30's, and 40's it appears as if we are implementing the bones of our dreams and imaginings, and making them real. We get jobs, make money, some settle down, get married, have children. We plan for retirement. Many people are supposedly living the dream, but whose dream is it?

When we imagine ourselves, or actually be in our 50's, 60's and older, what do we dream and imagine? What is the stuff of our imagination? My hopes and wishes are not the same as my dreams. I hope to remain healthy; I hope I can sustain my lifestyle; I hope to see my children more regularly... These are not dreams. So what are my dreams?

That we dream is an essential core to our being human - not unlike breathing. That we have limitless capacity to not only dream but fulfill our dreams, is as plain as the petals on a flower. That we choose to limit our abilities to fulfill our dreams is only based on the interpretations within which we make believe. Here are some common beliefs I hear: "I'm too old; I don't have the resources; If I had more time I could; I'm going to fail; I'm afraid I am undeserving of having my dreams come true; What's the point of fulfilling a dream - where's it going to get me?; If I were someone else I know I could do it. And, one of my favorites: I only dream dreams that I know I can make happen."

It takes courage and strength, at every age, to take full responsibility for the focused intent that underlies the fulfillment of our dreams. To dream or not to dream doesn't matter so much as choosing to ask two questions: "Am I living my dream?" That's a scary one. The next question could be even scarier, depending on how you answered that first: "Am I willing to cultivate the courage and strength to dream, and to live into that, regardless of the outcome?"

I'm sitting with these two questions myself. They are stirring something within me. In this moment, I dream to be as courageous as Randall. Why? Because he is willing to risk facing his worst fears for the sake of experiencing the truest expression of himself. He knows the outcome will most likely not be the fame and fortune he dreamed of as a child, though, given his convictions, that is undoubtedly a huge possibility. Regardless of the outcome, he is going for it!

Aging like a guru brings possibility to every aspect of everyone's life. Limitations are like clouds in the sky that can be disappeared with intention and belief that everything is possible, yes, even if you're "old."

Aging like a guru allows us to look closely at our beliefs and the conditions within which we built those beliefs. We see how it made perfect sense for Randall to stop living his dream, given the conditions of the environment within which he was raised. We see how Randall now has the capacity to create conditions that allow him to live into his dream effortlessly. If we can see it for Randall, then we can begin to see it for ourselves.

Aging like a guru truly allows us to live the dream; we just have to discern what that dream is for each of us!

About Rosie

Dr. Rosie Kuhn, author of the popular 'Self-Empowerment 101' and founder of The Paradigm Shifts Coaching Group, is the preeminent Thought Leader in the field of transformational coaching, coach training and leadership development. Rosie specializes in identifying and transforming belief systems that hold us back in business and in life. She empowers individuals, executives and organizations to fearlessly embrace transformation and realize previously untapped potential.

Rosie has successfully coached and trained professionals in banking, sales, recruiting, HR, health, education, and non-profit organizations, for clients such as Gap Inc., SanDisk, Flextronics, Sun Microsystems and Nike Israel.

Engaging and charming, Rosie is a popular speaker, facilitator and blogger. She captivates audiences, often moving them to both laughter and tears. She has appeared at the podium, on television and radio, at the San Francisco New Living Expo, Santa Clara University and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Her blogs can be found at www.dr-rosie.com. Outside of her career,

Rosie makes her home on Orcas Island in the Pacific Northwest. She sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, aboard a 93-foot schooner. Her second book *The Unholy Path of a Reluctant Adventurer* tells the story of her choice-making process that took her to the far reaches of appropriate womanhood and closer to her own true essence of being. All of Rosie's books are available at amazon.com.

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