

tals. We teach French or English to immigrant women. We staff charity gift shops and volunteer libraries. We are conscientious members of boards of charitable organizations. We are active in churches, temples, and synagogues. We dish out food in soup kitchens, raise money for the United Way and the Red Cross and every worthy cause in the country. We serve our communities in a multitude of ways, often anonymously, seldom recognized for the unpaid work we do. Having been busy, caring people until the age of sixty-five, we do not suddenly abandon a way of life when we pass through the invisible barrier that separates middle from old age.

A phenomenon of the last few years has been the return to schools, colleges, and universities of older women from every walk of life. I am told by their teachers that they are a delight to have, whether as a whole class of "seniors" or as single students in regular classes. The "returning students" are alert, interesting, vocal, and challenging. They are doing much to change the stereotyping of old women, enriching their own lives in the process.

It is sad that so many of us are victims of the misconceptions regarding growing old. We too equate "old" with "bad" and waste these precious years of our lives longing for an impossible youth and dreading the future. Most of us, however, appreciate the fact of our survival. When asked how we feel, we answer cheerfully, "pretty good, thank you," or in a more Canadian "not bad, thank you." We may not agree with Robert Browning that "the best is yet to be," but we know that the "last of life" may last thirty years. We want to make those years as productive as possible. We think we can move in that direction by accepting ourselves as we are, by placing value on age instead of trying to deny it.

Sybil Shack is a Winnipeg writer, retired teacher and school principal, member of the Seniors' Think Tank, board member of the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties and the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

First Draft.

My grandmother in her lifetime
roared like a lion, prowled the boundaries
of cages she never acknowledged.

1894 to 1984: changes
in everything but her conviction,
her power, her will. She made
herself a businesswoman, she wheeled
and dealt — they tell me.

I came into her life when she was already
fifty-six, only daughter of her only daughter —
no sons. She wanted, I thought,
to buy me: I retreated. She unabated
wooed, reproached and, later, shouted.

She was in her prime a force
to be reckoned with, they say, with a habit
of winning. What other women mostly didn't,
she did. Prosperous, confident, business-
suited — in the photographs.

For the puny twelve years
of my adult life, my grandmother
was a lion at bay,
the scope of her power shrunk, her will
a gleaming, lasting monument.

"Old Boot" I thought — a grudging,
distancing compliment — still
nervous of approaching the old woman
for fear of the lion.

This lion, made tearful by increasing impotence,
this old lady who, rejecting the last
social constraints, snarled at everyone,
she died in the night, curled on her side
peacefully, we assume from appearances.
Then she lay quiet and waited, like a good
little girl, for us to come and take over.

And we, who had leaned for years, as if against
an opposing gale, found ourselves suddenly
off balance.

Christine Donald

Toronto, Ontario