
Shirley Showalter

First, I want to thank Eric for the suggestion that resulted in conversations in the program meetings of the last three months and in the foregoing short essays prepared for the board. It seems we are evolving a sustained vocational dialogue of our own, just as we have helped many other people recover their vocations. Out of our unique voices, strengths, and callings, we are beginning to see a whole emerge.

Here are some of my passions: being a mentor and seeing other people—you! —blossom and grow. My passion is to love you into your full potential for being and loving and to attract to our group the others who are ready to engage our mission. I want to learn more about the nature of leadership by knowing and serving each program staff member. Leading a loving learning community is the highest calling I have at this time in my life.

I have other passions also. One might call them intensified interests or desires. You know of my interest in music. I wrote about it in the *Living the Questions* book. This passion connects with my vocation of leading a loving learning community because music is both a metaphysical and physical manifestation of love in community. I come from a singing family and a singing community. At some visceral level beyond words, I know that creation and transformation originate in sound. I hope some day we will have a science able to explain what some of us can only sense and feel now.

Another passion of mine relates to the enormous need I sense on the part of my own generation as we approach the age of 60 and beyond. A few weeks ago I used Tenneyson's *Ulysses* for our meditation. I said then that I loved the poem's old-fashioned ending: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." This is a *young* man's imagining of a good old age. It appeals to all the parts of me that do not want to "go gentle into the good night."

I stand at a crossroads in my own life between youth and age. I am a "baby boomer," a member of the now "young old" generation predicted to change the course of aging in this country and the world. For some time I have felt a stirring to challenge my peers not let this opportunity pass us by. The potential for transforming the emerging global community by gathering up the wisdom of the elders is something I feel in my bones. Eighty million Americans and many millions more in other countries could change the world again, just like we did in our youth.

I'd like to share some wisdom from a book Mark shared with me--Helen Luke's *Old Age: Journey into Simplicity*, a marvelously inspiring book. Luke describes three gifts of old age, many of them counter-intuitive:

- Loss of enchantment—lessening of senses, energy
- Helpless rage at the terrifying folly of [human beings]
- Memories. Seeing how much harm we did often in the past when we tried to do good.
- Recognizing our egos like never before.

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Luke's view of aging was highly influenced by Carl Jung in his famous *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*:

"Now we may begin to hear that new language which is more in the nature of spontaneous song, the 'music of God' in every happening, whether of pain or joy. The music is unique in you, and in me and in every detail of the incarnate world, but however simple or complex, however loud or soft, it will harmonize with the great 'unstruck sound' of the totality."

Obviously this passage brings two of my passions together—music and the wisdom of age. They connect to our mission in ways I intuit but do not yet have language to explain fully. Singer/song writer Paul Simon faced his own mortality with these words: "This is the story of how we begin to remember. This is the powerful pulsing of love in the veins. After the dream of falling and calling your name out. These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain."

So how do I weave together my stated vocation and these stated passions? Robert Frost in "Two Tramps in Mud Time" suggests the beginning of an answer:

My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sake.

My vocation is to serve the board, Tom, and the program staff in helping to build a loving learning community internally and to offer a powerful boost to the mission externally through wise program choices and implementation. I also have avocational interests in leadership, music and powerful, engaged aging. Will they have a role in program? My question is this: What if we began to see vocation as less related to work and more related to human development--something that begins at birth and comes to fruition in the later years, regardless of our career paths? How would we shape our "Recovering the Heart of Vocation" context with that thought in mind? I plant this question like Ulysses' oar in the garden of possibility. Only if others want to explore it more fully will it find a home in program.

As I complete one year of service to all of you, I am deeply grateful to have found a place where vocation and avocation are united and where love and need are one.