

Elderhood in the Raw

Elderhood in the Raw

by [Robert Augustus Masters, PhD](#)

sourced from [Robert Augustus Masters newsletter](#)

April 16, 2019

Elderhood is far from common – it is not something that automatically happens when we reach a certain age. It is something that is honed, deepened, birthed through the ongoing labor of ceasing to be a slave to our conditioning, especially after we're no longer ascending the peak but are slowly, slowly sliding down the other side of it.

As such, it is more an undoing than a doing, an alignment with what doesn't decline as we decline – it doesn't depend on all our faculties operating at optimal levels, but does depend on deliberate, steady, disciplined alignment with what truly matters in the latter stages of an unabashedly human life.

Elders are not busy homesteading on the top rung, speaking from on high; they are still evolving, knowing this inside and out, still curious amidst the creaking and complaining of bones and sinews, still reaching even as they rest, their journey one of endless discovery and deepening, with their mortality whispering to them more and more often. Elders are iconoclastic warriors of heart and guts and unsung knowings, even if they are hobbling or super-forgetful or cranky – you can count on them to be straight with you, to challenge your certainties, to care about what really matters.

They are unapologetically human, having done their time in the forges and chill waters and considerable tests of maturation, bearing scars seen and unseen, their bloodstream taking its time, their foot easing off the accelerator, belly and jaw

soft. Do they get reactive, cranky, abrupt, edgy? Sure, but in palatable doses, with whatever cleanup is needed close at hand. Elders may be mellow some of the time, but are not stuck in being positive.

Elders have the capacity to die into Life, to die into a deeper death – as do some who are much more youthful – but they bring to this a gravitas, a getting-it-in-the-bones that is far less accessible for the younger. The decline of the body, however fit or trim or young-looking, gives fledgling elderhood the grounding, deep-rooted sobriety it needs.

Elders are clear, idiosyncratic channels for muddy waters, not caring much if they get dirty in the process. Etiquette may not be their strong suit. Their bodies may not be doing so well, but they honor their somatic reality, taking care of it without taking too much care of it. They do not bewail their physical and mental decline; it's a slow downhill dance that is free of wallflowers and the need for an audience.

Elderhood is a robustly wrinkled ripeness, harvested for those who make their way toward it. In the buzz and hustle of contemporary culture, elders may seem like anachronisms, souvenirs from decimated cultures, with initiation rituals in one pocket and wheeze-reducing herbs in the other – but they are at the leading edge of our times, however small their numbers, doing what they can to help root us in our deep humanity even as we stretch for better skies.

Turn toward them. Honor them. Use them. Elders aren't just taking a bedrock-strong stand, but are servants of that stand, stewards of the deeply relevant. They do this without hope, but with a stubbornly unshakable faith, their bodies bent but aglow with what this asks of them. Let us lean together into this, both bowing to it and embodying it, no matter how broken or aged our step may be.

[Connect with Robert Augustus Masters](#)