

Baby Boomers Confront their Mortality:

**A comparison of those whose parents are living and those whose parents have died
Vicki L. Axe, Rabbi/Cantor, BMuEd, MA Music Education, BA Sacred Music, DM**

Rabbi Vicki L. Axe

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for the
The Interfaith Clinical Education for Pastoral Ministry
Doctor of Ministry Degree**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Studies Program
New York, New York**

May 2015

Mentors: Rabbi Richard F. Address and Reverend Douglass B. Clark

~ Dedicated to my beloved family ~

Harold

Judah Ellie and Maren

Noah Amira and Jillian

Gabe and Dan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Studying for the Doctor of Ministry provided an opportunity to explore and deepen my instincts as a pastoral caregiver, and to develop my skills as a pastoral counselor. I am very grateful to the faculty of the Interfaith Doctor of Ministry in Clinical Education for Pastoral Ministry Program at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for the wisdom and insights they offered throughout the four semesters of didactic, practical, supervisory, and integrative courses.

In particular, I am grateful for the leadership, wisdom, and compassion of the Director, the Reverend Ann M. Akers, and my project mentors Rabbi Richard F. Address, and the Reverend Douglass B. Clark, all of whom model the very heart of pastoral presence and provided encouragement and guidance throughout this journey.

I want to thank my classmates who brought the perspectives of their varying faith communities to all of our discussions. We drew insight from each other's religious teachings and personal life experiences, while learning to integrate psycho-dynamic principles with theology in a way that will benefit those whom we have been called to serve.

I am deeply grateful for all the members of my sacred family at Congregation Shir Ami. They inspire me to be best that I can be in providing a welcoming and safe haven to share their greatest joys and unload their most challenging burdens and everything in between.

I especially want to thank the Shir Ami Leadership for providing an abundance of encouragement, understanding, and financial support needed to complete this program.

I am deeply grateful to the members of Shir Ami who contributed to the study by responding to the survey and participating in the Focus Group. All nine participants shared their insights and personal experiences with heart-felt openness, forthrightness, transparency, caring, and compassion.

Finally, I cannot ever fully express my profound appreciation for my family. I begin with my parents who raised me to know joy in every aspect of life, even in the face of illness and loss. My mother was the pragmatic one and my father was a dreamer, but both taught me to live each day with joy and gratitude, drawing strength and comfort

from our traditions as we celebrated our heritage as what we affectionately called “practicing Reform Jews.”

My older sisters, Stevie and Jacki, were equally instrumental in my development. Stevie taught me how to vigilantly focus on my studies and bring beauty into the world. Jacki, who died of breast cancer at the age of thirty-four, taught me how to live and die with joy, dignity, and acceptance.

My four sons, Judah, Noah, Gabe, and Dan have become my teachers. Along with Judah and Noah’s remarkable life-mates Ellie and Amira respectively, and each of their amazing daughters Maren and Jillian, they lovingly inspire me and challenge me to be more open, more accepting of those around us. A college professor of special education and behavioral psychology, a nurse in pediatric oncology, a music event producer, and a sound engineer for live theatre, they form my greatest fan club as we all encourage one another to strive for excellence.

And Harold, my best friend and husband of forty-four years as of this writing in 2015, is the president of my fan club and truly the “wind beneath my wings,” sharing endless adventures while supporting and encouraging me in every endeavor, especially in pursuit of this Doctor of Ministry degree.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Chapter 1: Issue Addressed by Project	1
A. Background	1
B. Pastoral Need and Intervention	2
Chapter 2: Principles that Guide and Inform	6
A. Religious Background and Theology	6
B. Clinical Principles	9
Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedure	20
Chapter 4: Results	26
A. Observations from Survey	26
B. Observations from Focus Group	29
C. Unanticipated Results	32
D. Transference and Countertransference	64
Chapter 5: Discussion	67
A. Implication for Religious Principles	67
B. Implications for Clinical Principles	71
C. Wider Context	80
D. The Future	82
E. Concluding Thoughts	84
Appendices	86
A. Survey Email	86
B. Survey Questions	86
C. Focus Group Participants	95
D. Focus Group Attendance	95
E. Focus Group 1 Transcription	96
F. Focus Group 2 Transcription	115
G. Focus Group 3 Transcription	138
H. Focus Group 4 Transcription	144
I. Focus Group 5 Transcription	162
J. Focus Group 6 Transcription	188
K. Sacred Aging Flyer	218
L. Sacred Aging Press Release	219
M. Tom Hussey selected photos from “Reflections”	221
Bibliography	222

CHAPTER 1: ISSUE ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

Hypothesis

Baby Boomers whose parents have died are more aware of/informed about their mortality than those whose parents are still living and this impacts their quality of life and the degree to which they embrace the blessings of life.

A. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

“Now that both of my parents are gone, I’m next in line.” That is a refrain often heard in the midst of bereavement following the death of a second parent. This loss is most often endured by the population who fall into the sociological category identified as Baby Boomers, those born post World War II from 1946 to 1964.

As an early Baby Boomer born in 1948, I know the challenges facing our generation. While “the first Baby Boomers reached the standard retirement age of 65 in 2011” (“Baby Boom Generation.” <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2061.html>), this aging population continues working long past this age as much out of economic need as the reality that they are still vibrant and productive. Many Baby Boomers have post-college-age children, young adults in their 20s and 30s, who continue to be dependent on their parents for financial support. For those whose parents are still living into their 80s and 90s, Baby Boomers have become primary caregivers, managing their parents’ healthcare and financial affairs. And all this occurs while facing their own emerging health issues. All of this affects the economic security, physical and emotional health, and spiritual well-being of the Baby Boomer generation.

It is our spiritual well-being that I wish to address with my Doctor of Ministry Demonstration Project, keeping in mind that economic security along with physical and

emotional health impacts our spiritual life. From the beginning of time, people have sought a spiritual framework through which to navigate the ultimate human questions of life and death – how can I embrace life while averting death. How can I, as a congregational rabbi, help those who seek my counsel, embrace life, while averting death?

Having lost both of my parents and my sister by the time I was 35, death became close and personal at a relatively early age. My father was 72 when he died of heart disease. My mother was 58 when she died of cancer, about two months after diagnosis. My sister was 34 when she died after a five year battle with metastatic breast cancer. They were all much too young, but as an emerging adult of the Baby Boomer generation, I learned to embrace life knowing that every day is a precious gift. I learned that death is not some ephemeral concept that has little or nothing to do with me, but rather a final destination, not to be averted, but to be embraced as a motivating factor in how I live my life.

B. PASTORAL NEEDS AND INTERVENTION

Boomers make up over 50% of Congregation Shir Ami, the thirteen-year-old congregation that I have the privilege to serve as rabbi, cantor, educational director, and administrator. The issues facing Boomers in the larger population are certainly reflected in the lives of those members of my congregation who were born between 1946 and 1964. With the current life expectancy averaging somewhere in the 80s with many living into their 90s and 100s, we are living two to three decades longer than our parents and grandparents.

These extra years can cause fear and concern when one ruminates on the economic ramifications and what will unfold in relationship to the health and deterioration of our mind and body, all leading toward our ultimate demise. The purpose of this project is to address the issues facing my congregants and the broader community in a meaningful and spiritually uplifting way. Human existence has a beginning and an end, and I believe that if we can accept the raw truth that life is finite, that, at the appointed time, we will die, then we can live more fully.

“Remembering that I’ll be dead soon,” noted Steve Jobs in his commencement speech to the Stamford University graduating class of 2005, “is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything – all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure – these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.”

In the introduction to his book *A Jewish Book of Comfort*, Alan Kay espouses this idea when he states, “I think my father lived as fully as he did because after his own father’s sudden death, he was thrown forcefully onto that same path of reconciliation to the truth of his own mortality and stood shakingly yet defiantly to meet its challenges ... Even in his death, my father was a teacher because in his dying and death, he gently brought me to begin to walk the path of reconciliation to the truth of my own mortality” (Kay, 1993, p. xv).

I believe, like Alan Kay and Steve Jobs, that how we view our mortality impacts the way we live our lives. My hypothesis is that Baby Boomers whose parents have died

are more aware of and informed about their mortality than those whose parents are still living and this impacts the degree to which they embrace the blessings of life. As a rabbi, I am in the unique position to hear people's narratives, to listen to their hopes, their dreams, their fears with compassionate curiosity, while drawing on my personal experience with illness and loss. As it says in the text preceding the Mourners' Kaddish in *Gates of Prayer for Weekdays and at a House of Mourning*, "grief is a great teacher when it sends us back to bless the living" (Stern, 1992, p. 43).

Since becoming spiritual leader of Congregation Shir Ami in 2003, I can look back on my twelve years of High Holy Day Sermons and observe a theme woven into many of them to convey my belief in the value of embracing life while acknowledging that life is not without end, that life is finite. On Rosh Hashanah Morning, 2008, I opened my sermon which I entitled "The Gift of Life," with the following:

When does life begin? Some say that life begins at the moment of conception when the sperm fertilizes the egg. Some say that life begins when the baby is separated from the mother at birth and can thrive on its own. Others conclude that life begins when the children leave home and the dog dies. I suggest that for many, life begins when we encounter death up close and personal so that we are somehow reborn and come to appreciate every moment of our life as a gift.

My parents always dreamed of traveling to Europe, but something always seemed to get in the way. Then at the age of 58 my mother died and left my 60 year old father alone with their dreams. After recovering from a heart attack a few years later, my father remarried a lovely woman who filled the void left by loss and illness. They enjoyed a sweet life together filled with adventures and travel. Maggie was no more engaging than my mother, but my father understood that life is fragile and life is to be lived, now!

Life is so fragile, I continued. In a heartbeat everything changes. And we meet year to year during these Ten Days of Repentance to take what is called a *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, an accounting of the soul to determine just how we confront the fragility of life. Just moments ago we intoned the terrifying words, as we do each year, *B'Rosh Hashanah*

yikateivun uv'Yom Tzom Kippur yechateimun. On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. We are compelled to envision a very human God, enthroned on high as *Dayan Ha-emet*, the Judge of Truth. And each year on Erev Rosh Hashanah this God, this Judge of Truth ceremoniously opens the Book of Life on which the name of every human soul who has ever walked this earth is meticulously scribed, waiting for the annual Divine judgment.

I am reminded of the 1991 movie, *Defending Your Life* with Albert Brooks and Meryl Streep. Daniel Miller has it all – great friends, a terrific job, and a brand-new BMW – that is, until he crashes the car into a bus as soon as he drives it off the lot on his birthday. Daniel finds himself in Judgment City, a holding place in the afterlife, where the newly dead have to defend the way they lived their lives in a courtroom style process. Every moment of the deceased's life is on videotape catalogued by date and time and the prosecutor and defense attorney access a few episodes to show whether you made the most of your life. If you didn't make the most of your life, you will be sent back to try again and again until you get it right.

During the day Daniel defends his less-than-courageous life, and in the evenings he enjoys the perks of Judgment City, the Past Lives Pavilion, a gourmet restaurant offering all the food you can eat without any risk of weight gain, and Julia, the woman he's waited for all his life. But if he can't prove his life wasn't governed by fear, Daniel has to go back. And Julia, a woman who seemingly lived a perfect life of courage and generosity, especially compared to his, is clearly destined to move onward.

The proceedings do not go well for Daniel as a series of episodes from his life reveal Daniel continuously making bad decisions and fear-driven choices in the face of opportunities. His fate is sealed when he allows fear to keep him from becoming intimate with Julia, the free-spirited, grab life as it is woman of his dreams. In the end Daniel breaks free and risks everything to follow his heart and be by her side. It took his own death to show him how to live, to wake him up to life.

I often wonder why we have to be shaken by the loss of a loved one or a grave illness as in the case of my father, as in the case of Daniel in *Defending Your Life*, to appreciate the gift of life.

CHAPTER 2: PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE AND INFORM

A. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND THEOLOGY

I don't believe that religion offers answers to the challenges of life. I believe that religion offers a framework in which to confront the challenges and engage in the difficult conversations. Clergy people are in a unique position to offer support and comfort in a safe, caring environment.

I believe that the High Holy Days, as a metaphor for life and death, offers an annual opportunity to confront our mortality. Each year as I prepare for these Ten Days of Repentance, I have an image of Jews in synagogues throughout the world going through a communal and personal "near death experience" from the beginning of Rosh Hashanah to the end of Yom Kippur. I don't know if I believe in such other worldly phenomenon, but I believe that there are very important life lessons to be learned.

The personal accounts of this extraordinary experience all have common characteristics – calmness and serenity, a sensation of floating outside of the body, traveling upward through a tunnel, a sensory review of the life lived so far, a bright white light, often identified as a divine being at the other end of the tunnel offering welcoming arms at heavens gates then accepting that you are not yet ready, a return to the body, and a sense of well-being with a reborn appreciation for life. It is the reborn appreciation of life following the brush with death that I am addressing in my project.

There are several analogies to the "near death experience" throughout the Ten Days of Repentance. Every Rosh Hashanah morning we read the Biblical account of the *Akedah, the Binding of Isaac*. We listen in disbelief as Abraham is instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering to God. They walk calmly, quietly for three days to the

appointed location. Isaac is bound on the altar, and there is Abraham poised over his beloved son Isaac, knife in hand, ready to pierce his heart and slay him when an angel calls from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham” (Genesis 22:1-19).

I would suggest that the three day walk to the top of Mt. Moriah can be likened to the floating ascent through the tunnel. I can only imagine how Abraham’s life passed before him as he raised the knife to slay the beloved son of his old age. I can only imagine what images passed before Isaac, bound, waiting for the fatal blow. And then the angel called out, not once, but twice, the Divine presence at the end of the tunnel offering a second chance at life for both of them, an opportunity to be reborn. How close have we been to the knife piercing our hearts? And how do we respond to a renewed opportunity for life when the knife is withdrawn?

The Shofar Service can also be likened to a journey of life and death proportions. There are three sections to the Shofar Service, *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofrot*. *Malchuyot* means majesty which is certainly the feeling we have as we rise to hear the clarion call of the shofar. We are called to the moment of our birth. What a majestic moment when a new life offers the promise of human greatness and potential. *Zichronot* means memory when, as in the near-death experience, our life passes before us, before God, the Judge of Truth to be viewed and reviewed, we pray, with justice and compassion. *Shofrot* means redemption, the bright light at the end of the tunnel, offering each of us the opportunity for rebirth. And *Tekiah Gedolah*, the one long piercing sound at the conclusion of Yom Kippur as we prepare to leave the synagogue and return to the daily stuff of our lives, calling us to action, to appreciate every moment of our life as a precious gift.

Which brings me to the terrifying text of *Unetaneh Tokef* read every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur morning. *On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed, who shall live and who shall die.* The text goes on to describe in grave and graphic detail all of the possibilities of what may unfold for each of us in the year to come.

How many shall pass on and how many shall come to be?
Who shall live and who shall die?
Who shall see ripe age and who shall not?
Who shall perish by fire and who by water?
Who by sword and who by beast?
Who by hunger and who by thirst?
Who by earthquake and who by plague?
Who by strangling and who by stoning?
Who shall be secure and who shall be driven?
Who shall be tranquil and who shall be troubled?
Who shall be poor and who shall be rich?
Who shall be humbled and who exalted?

And then that near death experience of the Divine light at the end of the tunnel offering renewal and rebirth as we intone the words of hope, *u-t'shuvah, u-t'filah u-tzedakah maavirin et ro-ah ha g'zeirah* – *But repentance, prayer and charity temper judgment's severe decree.*

The *Yizkor Memorial Service* on Yom Kippur Day as the gates of heaven begin to close gives us an annual opportunity to come into direct contact with our loved ones who have gone on to their eternal home. We confront the possibility of our own death as we hold the memory of our loved ones in our hearts. Traditionally, only those who have lost one of the seven close relatives as listed in Leviticus 21:1-3 – father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, spouse – is allowed to attend the *Yizkor Memorial Service* (Lamm, 1969, p.79). In a more liberal setting, anyone who wishes to participate in this service of

memory and reflection is welcome, providing an opportunity for all – those whose parents are still living, as well as those whose parents have died – to reach towards the white light that awaits all of us in our final destination.

While other holidays we observe throughout the Jewish calendar year are life-affirming and offer annual opportunities to consider the fragility of life, I believe that it is only the Ten Days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur when we encounter life and death in the balance and are mandated to choose life.

The life and death metaphors woven into the liturgy and practices of the High Holy Days offer a clear message that Judaism teaches us to confront and acknowledge our mortality so that we can embrace life. Every year on Yom Kippur Morning we read from the Book of Deuteronomy, “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that I have set before you life or death, blessings or curse; choose life, therefore, that you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

B. CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

Freudian Theory

According to Sigmund Freud as stated in his essay, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” “The goal of all life is death” (Freud, 1922). He opens his essay with the following observation:

In the psycho-analytical theory of the mind we take it for granted that the course of mental processes is automatically regulated by ‘the pleasure-principle’: that is to say, we believe that any given process originates in an unpleasant state of tension and thereupon determines for itself such a path that its ultimate issue coincides with a relaxation of this tension, i.e. with avoidance of ‘pain’ or with production of pleasure.

Kendra Cherry points out that “He [Freud] noted that after people experience a traumatic event (such as war), they often reenact the experience.” “He concluded,” she

continues, “that people hold an unconscious desire to die, but that this wish is largely tempered by the life instincts” (Cherry, online April 21, 2014).

Object Relations Theory

According to Steven Mitchell and Margaret Black in *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*, W.R.D. Fairbairn and D.W. Winnicott were among the major proponents of Object Relations Theory. They “questioned Freud’s premise that the fundamental motivation in life is pleasure and proposed a different starting point: Libido is not pleasure-seeking, but object-seeking. The fundamental motivational push in human experience is not gratification and tension reduction, using others as a means towards that end, but connections with others as an end in itself” (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p.115). Or put another way, in instinct theories, objects exist to satisfy instincts or drives. In object relations theories, objects exist to create relationships.

The first and most basic relationship for object relations theorists is with the mother. The mother is everything to the infant, providing for every need, and the infant is the “all-powerful center of all being – subjective omnipotence is the term Winnicott used. His wish makes things happen” (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p.126). According to Fairbairn, an infant begins in a state of total dependence on the mother and moves towards independence. The newborn is actually one with the mother, having spent nine months inside of her. From birth, the infant is in complete psychological unity with the mother and has the potential to become a separate person. The infant goes from identification with the mother to differentiation.

According to Fairbairn in his paper, “A Revised Psychopathology of the Psychoses and Psychoneuroses,” as found in *Essential Papers on Object Relations* edited

by Peter Buckley, M.D., “The outstanding feature of infantile dependence is its unconditional character. The infant is completely dependent upon his object not only for his existence and physical well-being, but also for the satisfaction of his psychological needs” (Buckley, 1986, p. 47).

“The development of object-relationships,” he goes on to say, “is essentially a process whereby infantile dependence upon the object gradually gives place to mature dependence upon the object.” “This process of development,” he continues, “is characterized (a) by the gradual abandonment of an original object-relationship based upon identification, and (b) by the gradual adoption of an object-relationship based upon differentiation of the object” (Buckley, 1986, p.77).

For the infant, the “object” is the mother. Fairbairn describes this infantile dependency as unconditional in nature. “The infant is completely dependent upon his object, not only for his existence and physical well-being, but also for the satisfaction of his psychological needs” (Buckley, 1986, p.89). It is the role of the mother to create a holding environment. According to Winnicott in his paper, “The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship,” “The term ‘holding’ is used here to denote not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environmental provision prior to the concept of living with” (Buckley, 1986, p.240). He goes on to explain that “in the holding phase the infant is maximally dependent,” and suggests three classifications of dependency: absolute dependency, relative dependency, and towards independence (Buckley, 1986, p. 242).

In the state of absolute dependence, “the infant has no means of knowing about the maternal care, which is largely a matter of prophylaxis. [S/he] cannot gain control

over what is well and what is badly done, but is only in a position to gain profit or to suffer disturbance.” In the state of relative dependence, “the infant can become aware of the need for the details of maternal care, and can, to a growing extent, relate them to personal impulse, and then later, in a psycho-analytic treatment, can reproduce them in the transference.” The infant is now aware that s/he is a participant in the relationship.

Finally, the infant reaches toward independence in which “the infant develops means for doing without actual care. This is accomplished through the accumulation of memories of care, the projection of personal needs and the introjection of care details, with the development of confidence in the environment. Here must be added the element of intellectual understanding with its tremendous implications” (Buckley, 1986, 242). In other words, the infant learns, for example, to remember that it is not going to starve.

“It is crucial,” explains Mitchell, “that the mother be there when needed, but it is equally crucial that she recede when she is not needed.” “She creates,” he continues, “what Winnicott termed a holding environment, a physical and psychical space within which the infant is protected without knowing he is protected, so that very obliviousness can set the stage for the next spontaneously arising experience” (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p.126).

Balanced with the soothing holding environment is the motivational role of impingement, which is the removal of the holding environment. The child needs to be frustrated a little in order to learn that s/he is not one with the mother and reach towards independence. In the journey from dependence to independence, from identification with the mother to differentiation from the mother, the child is floating between a holding environment and impingements. In his paper, “A Revised Psychopathology of the

Psychoses and Psychoneuroses,” Fairbairn points out that “Normal development is characterized by a process whereby progressive differentiation of the object is accompanied by a progressive decrease in identification” (Buckley, 1986, p. 90).

Along with impingements from the external world, which lead to independence from the mother, the infant is beginning to play with his/her body, which leads to an internal understanding that “my body is not my mother.” The infant’s use of “fist, fingers, thumbs in stimulation of the oral erotogenic zone” (Buckley, 1986, 254) is transitional phenomena which leads to the infant reaching out and grabbing material transitional objects like a stuffed animal or a blanket, something that is not the mother.

Too much impingement, too early in the development of the child, leads to annihilation, but in the right balance with a holding environment, at the optimum time, impingement will lead to independence. This oceanic union with something outside of oneself, this differentiation is a concept in object relations theory called “going-on-being” “Going-on-being” as described by Stephen Mitchell is Winnicott’s portrayal of “the newborn as drifting in a stream of unintegrated moments; discrete wishes and needs emerge spontaneously and, as they are met, melt back into the drift.” “Winnicott’s choice of unintegration to characterize the child’s earliest state of mind,” he continues, “is very important, suggesting an experience that is comfortably disconnected without being fragmented, diffuse without being terrifying” (Mitchell and Black, 1986, p.125).

I suggest that the relationship between the mother and adult child as postulated in Object Relations Theory affects the experience of loss and grief when the mother dies. This is the ultimate “impingement” as she withdraws completely from the now adult child. The degree to which the adult child has differentiated will impact the process of

mourning and how this loss relates to his/her own sense of mortality as a motivational force in how s/he embraces life.

Shame in Death and Grief

Jeffrey Kauffman further elucidates the tension between pleasure and pain emanating from issues of shame surrounding loss and grief in his book, *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma*, which is a collection of six essays. “Grief arouses ... shame for being alive while the other is dead,” points out Kauffman, “for being frightened, being vulnerable to death, being outcast, helpless, and abandoned” (Kauffman, 2010, p.4).

Many of the contributing authors attribute the inability to tolerate illness, death, and dying as a sociocultural cause of shame. “In a society that values productivity, stoicism, and control,” enumerates Darcy Harris in her essay, “Healing the Narcissistic Injury of Death in the Context of Western Society,” “death represents the shameful loss of all these things” (Harris, 2010, p.77). “In a society that is based upon the celebration of achievement and productivity,” she postulates, “death represents failure and loss of control (Harris, 2010, 84). “In Western society,” she further claims, “the healthy and integrative aspects of grief are often overshadowed by the high emphasis placed upon achievement and productivity, which creates a scenario of death denial and shame in regard to death-related experiences (Harris, 2010, p. 84).

In his essay, “Shame: A Hospice Worker’s Reflection,” Alex Tyree agrees. “The subject of death alone can evoke shame in our North American culture” (Tyree, 2010, p.90). “Loss of a loved one,” he continues, “is not supported by the American dream”

(Tyree, 2010, p.91). “The alternative position is to collude with our North American game of hiding death by distraction,” he concludes (Tyree, 2010, p.101).

Both Kauffman and Tyree point out that it is the human sense of powerlessness in the face of illness, death, and dying that elicits shame. “Grief anxiety that one’s world is out of control,” notes Kauffman, “induces shame and shame heightens loss of control anxiety” (Kauffman, 2010, p.4). “Shame may be the last holdout against the reality of death,” suggests Tyree. “Perhaps shame insists that we somehow have some power over death,” he continues, “but for some fault of our own, we are vulnerable and powerless against it” (Tyree, 2010, p.103).

Tyree shares his concern about the fate of society in light of shame surrounding issues of illness, death, and dying. He warns that

Our culture sets itself on a destructive course as it neglects, or outright denies, end-of-life issues. If not addressed, this will continue to bring great suffering to our society as increasing numbers of us are aging and may lack the humanity and wisdom to cope. Popular culture’s use of distraction and illusion disenfranchises many, and creates an environment of attachment, competition, and fear that fosters far more problems than there is room to explain in this work. In a sense, society’s own shame and subsequent denial can bring about the death of the soul (Tyree, 2010, p.106).

Isolation, aloneness, and feelings of abandonment are psychologically debilitating consequences of shame related to issues of illness, death, and dying. For those who are grieving the loss of loved ones these feelings, according to Victor L. Schermer in his essay, “Between Shame, Death, and Mourning: The Predispositional role of Early Attachments and the Sense of Self,” elicit childhood memories. “The fact that the dead no longer exist in ‘real time,’” he suggests, “can easily be interpreted by the child as similar

to isolation as a punishment or, more consequentially, of parental neglect and deprivation.

[This leads to] the perception of death and dying as shameful conditions of exclusion rather than normative aspects of the life cycle” (Schermer, 2010, p.35). “The infant’s ‘procedural memories’ and templates of anxiety, insecurity, absence, and aloneness,” he continues, “would subsequently attach themselves to what the infant later encounters about death and dying” (Schermer, 2010, p.36). “Shame becomes related to mourning,” maintains Schermer, “insofar as death and dying are perceived as isolation from human interaction and an exile from human contact” (Schermer, 2010, p.41).

Tyree agrees when he answers his own query, “Why do those who grieve feel so alone?” He postulates that “they embody what so many people fear for themselves, such as vulnerability, powerlessness to control external circumstances, loss of direction, anxiety, unanswerable questions, and death itself” (Tyree, 2010, p.95).

Kauffman proposes that, “A very common part of the grief reaction is to experience shame as being abandoned and helpless; shame at the shock of death and at one’s own mortality; shame inspired by the all-powerful, ultimate, invisible meaning of death; shame at the whole strange and wounded inner world of grief; shame at being stigmatized or polluted by death” (Kauffman, 2010, p.18).

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)

According to the National Institute of Health in the U.S. National Library of Medicine website, “Medline Plus,” bereavement is “the period of grief and mourning after a death.” Grief,” the article continues is “... part of the normal process of reacting to a loss. You may experience grief as a mental, physical, social or emotional reaction.

Mental reactions can include anger, guilt, anxiety, sadness and despair. Physical reactions can include sleeping problems, changes in appetite, physical problems or illness. How long bereavement lasts can depend on how close you were to the person who died, if the person's death was expected and other factors” (Bereavement, online March 28, 2014).

The American Psychiatric Association outlines the criteria and diagnostic features of Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder in the fifth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), and makes a distinction between this disorder and normal grief. “Persistent complex bereavement disorder is diagnosed [in adults] if at least 12 months have elapsed since the death of someone with whom the bereaved had a close relationship. This time frame discriminates normal grief from persistent grief. The condition typically involves a persistent yearning/longing for the deceased, which may be associated with intense sorrow and frequent crying or preoccupation with the deceased (Prigerson et al. 2009; Shear et al. 2011 as cited in American Psychiatric Association).

It seems that confronting one’s own death in light of the death of one or both parents could elicit a diagnosis of persistent complex bereavement disorder. But I maintain that as long as the grief, even beyond the designated twelve months duration, is not “associated with deficits in work and social functioning and with harmful behaviors ... or associated with marked increases in risks for serious medical conditions ... and reduced quality of life, (Prigerson et al. 2009 as cited in American Psychiatric Association) it is within the boundaries of “normal grief.”

Psychology in Jewish Mourning Practices

The way in Jewish mourning has been noted to be psychologically sound in its “intuitive wisdom about human nature and its needs” (Lamm, 1969, p. 78). Jewish law designates five stages of mourning with the first and most intense period between the death and the burial. The second is the first three days following the burial when the mourner is “devoted to weeping and lamentation,” is not expected to respond to greetings, and remains at home. The third stage is called *shiva* after the Hebrew word for seven, and extends the three days of the second stage to seven days when the mourner begins to talk about the loss and accept comfort from visitors while still remaining at home (Lamm, 1969, pp. 78-79).

The fourth stage is called *sheloshim* after the Hebrew word for thirty, extending the seven days of the third stage to thirty days when the mourner is encouraged to leave home, return to work, and rejoin society to a limited degree. And the fifth stage, for the loss of a parent only, is the same twelve month period designated in the DSM as an appropriate period for “normal grief.”

Like the DSM, Judaism expects the mourner to move from one stage to another with diminishing intensity of “sorrow and preoccupation with the deceased” (American Psychiatric Association). The mourner is instructed to “get up from *shiva*” on the seventh day by going outside for an obligatory walk around the block as a sign that s/he is emerging from this intense period of mourning.

On the other hand, unlike the DSM, Jewish practice calls on the living to make several memorial pilgrimages to the synagogue each year to reflect and remember their loved ones. The observant Jew will light a memorial candle at home and attend *Yizkor*

Memorial Services on Yom Kippur, Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot in the annual cycle of the Jewish calendar, (Lamm, 1969, p. 197) as well as on the anniversary of the death of a parent, every year for the rest of his/her life.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and Kessler findings align with the Jewish practice of life-long mourning as reflected in their observation that

“The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not ‘get over’ the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to” (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 230).

The lessons learned from illness, death, and loss are reflected in the introduction to the Mourner’s Kaddish in *Gates of Prayer for Weekdays and at a House of Mourning*,

Out of affliction the Psalmist learned the law of God. And in truth, grief is a great teacher, when it sends us back to serve and bless the living. We learn how to counsel and comfort those who, like ourselves are bowed with sorrow. We learn when to keep silence in their presence, and when a word will assure them of our love and concern. (Stern, 1992, p.43)

I agree. In my journal from 1994 documenting my personal experience with breast cancer, as published fourteen years later in *Life, Faith, and Cancer*, a collection of essays by rabbis and cantors who were diagnosed and treated for cancer, I wrote, “I have learned that whichever way it goes, illness [and the loss of a loved one] can be a gift, teaching us how profoundly fragile life is, putting life and death in front of us, making it close and personal so that we have to make a conscious choice between life and death, between blessing and curse. I choose life!” (Axe, 2008, p. 127).

It is my hope that through this project, I will learn to help others navigate the pain of loss, and the issues surrounding the death of loved ones and their own mortality so they can emerge from the pain and fears more alive, more aware of the gifts of life.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

I began by sending an email (Appendix A) to members and friends of Congregation Shir Ami, inviting the Baby Boomer population, those born between 1946 and 1964, to respond to a survey which was attached to the email (Appendix B). Using Monkey Survey, the survey was designed as a multiple choice questionnaire. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain quantitative or measurable data concerning the life and death of the respondents' parents and the role they played in managing their care.

Of interest for purposes of the study was the date of birth to identify the respondents as boomers, gender, ordinal position, (ie. only child/ brother and/or sisters), age at time of parents' death(s), if one or both of their parents have died, whether each parent's death was sudden or a long protracted one.

The survey included questions concerning the respondent's role as caregiver, as well as their own health issues, and the frequency with which they consider their own mortality. The last questions addressed how the respondent would define his/her faith or lack of faith. Finally, the survey ascertained the respondent's interest in and availability to participate in a six-session group discussion.

Later identified as a focus group, the six sessions were designed to produce verbal data, a qualitative form of data, generated via group interaction from discussion-based interviews among the participants (Millward, 2012, p.413). Further, focus groups have been defined as a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger and Casey, 2000, p. 5).

As the facilitator or moderator, my role was “to ensure that the discussion occurred in a focused way and to regulate the group dynamic” (Millward, 2012, p.413), and to offer participants the opportunity to explore issues with others in a safe, non-judgmental setting.

The survey was sent by email to 100 +/- people, including those who are on the Congregation Shir Ami member and “Friends of Shir Ami” email lists. There were forty-seven respondents and of those, fifteen expressed interest in participating in the group discussions, of which nine were available at mutually convenient times.

Several people who were a year or two outside the boundaries of the age limit expressed interest in responding to the survey and participating in the group. However, I felt that it was important to hold fast to the age parameters in order to stay true to the study of the baby boomer population as defined by the sociology community.

Group Participants Summary from the Survey

Nine of the forty-seven survey respondents participated in the Focus Group. The Focus Group met for six one-and-a-half-hour sessions during the summer of 2014, June 9, June 23, June 30, July 14, July 28, and August 4.

All nine participants identified themselves as Jewish, and all, but one, are members of Congregation Shir Ami. I think it is important to note that among the responses to the questions addressing issues of faith, those who said they attend services bi-weekly do so because that is all that Shir Ami offers and I believe those individuals would attend more frequently if it was offered. Of the two who said they attend services once a year for the High Holy Days, one comes to some of the services and the other attends all services, some with the family and some alone.

1. RF is female, age 65, born in 1949 in Brooklyn, NY. She has some college with no degree and works in sales. She is the oldest of five children with one brother and three sisters. Her mother has died and her father is living. Her mother died after a four year battle with cancer in 2001 at the age of 77 when RF was 52. She was living alone at home with siblings taking turns accompanying her to doctor appointments. The last few weeks her brothers stayed with her at night, and the last week RF was with her. RF's father is 88 and lives at home with his second wife. His physical and mental health are poor, having just been diagnosed with Lewy Body Disease. He lives in Florida and RF visits him as needed. RF has power of attorney and is the executor for her parents' financial affairs.

RF sometimes considers herself a person of faith. She was raised and identifies herself as reform Jewish. She does not find religion, communal prayer, or personal prayer a source of comfort. She attends services once a year for the High Holy Days and seldom prays. She does not seek comfort from others. She occasionally thinks about end-of-life issues.

2. FG is male, age 67, born in 1947 in Port Chester, NY. He is in sales, having worked in the auction industry. He is the youngest of three children with 2 older sisters. Both parents have died. His mother died in 2009 at the age of 96 when FG was 63 after suffering from pneumonia for several months. She was living at home and he was her primary caregiver. His father died in 1995 at the age of 89 when FG was 35. He had a series of strokes over a 4 year period. He was living in a skilled nursing care facility with a non-family member as his primary caregiver. FG had power of attorney and was the executor for his parents' financial affairs.

FG was raised Jewish and currently identifies himself as reform Jewish. He considers himself a person of faith and finds religion a source of comfort. He finds comfort in communal prayer and attends services a few times a year. He also finds comfort in personal prayer and prays occasionally. He seeks comfort from family. FG often thinks about end of life issues.

3. AK is male, age 66, born in 1947 in Mount Vernon, NY. He is an attorney and married to SK, another focus group participant. AK is the youngest of three children, with an older sister and an older brother. Both parents have died. His mother died suddenly of a stroke in 1985 at the age of 76 when he was 37. She was living at home independently and another family member was her primary caregiver. His father died in 1999 at the age of 90 when he was 51 after a 2-4 year illness of dementia and Parkinsons. He was living in a skilled nursing care facility

with a non-family member as his primary caregiver. AK and his brother had power of attorney and were executors for their parents' financial affairs.

AK was raised in a conservative Jewish home and currently belongs to a reform Jewish congregation. He considers himself a person of faith and finds religion a source of comfort. He does not find comfort in communal prayer and attends services a few times a year and prays weekly. He seeks comfort from clergy, family, and friends. He often thinks about end-of-life issues.

4. SK is female, age 64, born in 1949 in New York, NY. She has a graduate degree and is a retired teacher. She is married to AK, another focus group participant. SK is the older of two children with one younger brother. Both of her parents have died. Her mother died suddenly of a stroke in 2007 at the age of 84 when AK was 58. She was living in senior housing and another family member was her primary caregiver. Her father died suddenly of congestive heart failure in 2014 at the age of 94 when she was 64. He was living at home independently and a non-family member was his primary caregiver. SK had power of attorney and was the executor for her parents' financial affairs.

SK was raised and continues to identify as reform Jewish. She considers herself a person of faith and finds religion a source of comfort. She finds comfort in communal prayer and attends services a few times a year. She doesn't feel competent in personal prayer and seldom prays. She seeks comfort from friends, family, and her therapist. She occasionally thinks about end-of-life issues.

5. JM is female, age 59, born in 1954 in New York, NY. She has a bachelor degree and works in arts, design, entertainment, and sports media. She is married to RM, another focus group participant. She is the older of two daughters. Her mother has died and her father is living. Her mother died in 2009 at the age of 85 when she was 56 after a 2 year battle with cancer. She was living at home independently with her husband as her primary caregiver. Her father is 92 and has dementia. His physical health is fair with 90% of his life spent in a wheelchair since he fell and broke his hip. He lives in an assisted living facility where a non-family member is his primary caregiver and JM visits him weekly. JM has power of attorney and is the executor for her parents' financial affairs.

JM was raised as a non-practicing Jew and currently identifies herself as reform Jewish. She considers herself a person of faith and finds religion a source of comfort to varying degrees. She finds comfort in communal prayer and attends

services monthly. She seldom finds comfort in personal prayer and seeks comfort from family and friends. She occasionally thinks about end-of-life issues.

6. RM is male, age 60, born in 1953 in New York, NY. He has a graduate degree and works in management. He is married to JM, another focus group participant. He is an only child and both parents have died. His mother died in 2011 after a two year battle with stomach cancer at the age of 90 when he was 57. She was living at home independently. His father died after a two year battle with prostate cancer in 1996 at the age of 88 when he was 43. He was living at home independently with his wife as his primary caregiver. RM had power of attorney and was the executor for his parents' financial affairs.

RM does not consider himself a person of faith "in the sense the words 'of faith' typically connote." He was raised "conveniently" conservative and currently identifies himself as reform Jewish. He finds religion a source of comfort. He finds comfort in communal prayer and attends services monthly. He also finds comfort in personal prayer and prays seldom. He seeks comfort from clergy, family, and friends. He occasionally thinks about end-of-life issues.

7. KM is female, age 52, born in 1961 in Frankfurt, Germany. She has a graduate degree and works in sales as a realtor. She is the middle child of six children with one brother and four sisters. Her mother has died and her father is living. Her mother died suddenly in a fatal car accident in 1970 at the age of 34 when KM was 8. KM was in the car. Her father is 78 and is in good mental and physical health living at home independently with another family member as his primary caregiver. He, along with the rest of her birth family lives in Germany, her country of origin, while she lives here with her family and visits her father one or two times a year. Another family member has power of attorney and a non-family member is the executor for her parents' financial affairs.

KM considers herself a person of faith sometimes. She believes in God, but not in organized religion. Her family of origin was Christian and Jewish and she identifies herself as reform Jewish. She finds comfort in communal prayer and attends services once a year for the High Holy Days. She does not believe in personal prayer and seldom prays. She seeks comfort from friends and family. She occasionally thinks about end-of-life issues.

8. DN is male, age 60, born in 1953 in Nahariya, Israel. He is a social worker with a graduate degree and works with adults with developmental disabilities. He is married to SN, another focus group participant. DN is the younger of two children

with an older brother. Both parents have died. His mother died in 2000 at the age of 75 when he was 47 after six years of treatment for leukemia. She lived at home independently and his father was the primary caregiver. His father died in 2003 at the age of 80 when he was 50 after 32 years with prostate cancer. For the last year and a half, his father lived with DN's older brother who was his primary caretaker. The older son had power of attorney and was the executor for their parents' financial affairs.

DN was raised in a "very, very secular home," and currently identifies himself as reform Jewish. He considers himself a person of faith and finds religion a source of comfort. He finds comfort in communal pray, attends services bi-weekly [as offered by his congregation]. He does not find comfort in personal prayer and seldom prays. He seeks comfort from family and friends. He never thinks about end-of-life issues.

DN added the following comments at the end of the survey: As a child of Holocaust survivors, religion was never part of our life. Death or dying was never discussed at home and was considered part of life cycle. After the initial shock of death, my family, myself included, was good in blocking any feelings or memories, and we moved on with our life. I believe that it was a self-defense mechanism that my parents developed in order to continue living and raise a healthy family. I for sure inherited this from my parents.

9. SN is female, age 56, born in 1958 in New York, NY. She has a graduate degree and works in sales for her own online business. She is the youngest of four children with two older brothers and one older sister. Both of her parents are living. Her mother is 84, and her father is 90. They live at home independently. Her mother is in excellent physical and mental health. Her father is in excellent mental health and fair physical health with chronic back pain for which he walks with a cane. They live at home independently and her mother is primary caregiver to her father. She visits with them twice a month either in their home or hers. They are proxy and power of attorney for each other and this will go to her brother who is a doctor. She will be the executor for their financial affairs after their death.

SN considers herself a person of faith. She was raised and continues to identify herself as reform Jewish. She finds religion somewhat of a source of comfort and attends services bi-weekly [as offered by his congregation]. She finds comfort in both communal and personal prayer and mostly prays in the form of meditation previously daily and currently weekly. She seeks comfort from clergy, family, and

friends. She seldom thinks about end-of-life issues, but noted that completing the survey made her think about it more

The Focus Group consisted of nine participants for six one-and-a-half hour sessions. Focus Group participants had the opportunity to share their personal stories, reflect on the experience of caring for aging parents and/or losing their parents, and consider the impact on their own issues surrounding life, illness, and death.

Each session had a theme or focal point. I opened each session with a theme based initially and mostly on conjecture and advice prior to commencing the focus groups, then those that emerged organically from the responses to the survey, and finally, from the conversations that arose in the focus group sessions.

Here are the topics with which I opened each session with reference to the transcription of each session as found in Appendices E-J.

- 1) I invited each participant in turn to share personal experiences with death (Appendix E).
- 2) I read the poem “It is a fearful thing” by Chaim Stern and asked the participants to respond to the poem (Appendix F).
- 3) We talked about the economics of growing old and dying (Appendix G).
- 4) I posed the question, “What are you doing to stay young?” with anticipation of discussing denial and fear of growing old and dying (Appendix H).
- 5) I read *Unetaneh Tokef*– Who shall live and who shall die? from High Holy Day liturgy (Appendix I) and the discussion addressed burial and mourning practices.
- 6) I read my hypothesis and invited response (Appendix J) and much of the session was devoted to consideration of legacy.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

A. OBSERVATIONS FROM SURVEY

The survey was sent by email to 100 +/- people, including those who are on the Congregation Shir Ami member and “Friends of Shir Ami” email lists. There were 47

respondents. The survey included questions concerning the gender, and ordinal position (ie. only child/ brother and/or sisters) of the respondents, the life and death of the respondents' parents, if one or both of their parents have died, the frequency with which they consider their own mortality. The last questions addressed how the respondent would define his/her faith or lack of faith.

Of the 47 respondents, 33 or 70.21% are women, and 14 or 29.79% are men. 30 or 63.83% have graduate degrees, 12 or 25.53% have bachelor degrees, 3 or 6.38% have associate degrees, 1 or 2.13% has some college with no degree, and 1 or 2.13% has completed high school.

9 or 19.15% of the 47 respondents work in education, 6 or 12.77% work in legal occupations, 5 or 10.64% work in management, 5 or 10.64% work in business, 8 or 17.02% are in sales, 4 or 8.51% work in computers, 4 or 8.51% work in art or design, 3 or 6.38% work in social service, 2 or 4.26% are in healthcare, and 1 or 13% work in the social sciences.

Of the 47 respondents, 21 or 44.68% are the youngest in their families, 18 or 38.3% are the oldest, 5 or 10.64% are the middle, and 3 or 6.38% are only children.

22 or 51.16% of the respondents' parents had died at the time they took the survey. 8 or 18.6% of the respondents' mother s were living and their fathers had died. 7 or 16.28% of the respondents' fathers were living and their mothers had died. And 6 or 13.95% of the respondents had two living parents. Interestingly, 44.44% of the respondents visit their living mother monthly, and 42.86% visit their living father 2-3 times each month.

In consideration of end of life issues, I included questions about living wills and long term health insurance. 27 or 65.85% of the respondents' parents have or had a living will, and 14 or 44.15% who do not or did not. This compares with the respondents of which 24 or 57.14% have a living will, and 18 or 42.86% do not. Similarly, 12 or 29.27% of the respondents' parents do or did have long term health insurance, and 29 or 70.73% do not or did not. This compares with the respondents of which 19 or 45.24% have longer health insurance, and 23 or 54.26% do not. Interestingly, the parents of the boomers are slightly more inclined to have a living will than their boomer children, and the boomers are much more inclined to have long term health insurance than their aging parents.

In answer to the question, "How often do you think about end of life issues?" 6 or 13.95% said often with 25 or 58.14% responding occasionally. 11 or 25.58% responded seldom, and only 1 or 2.33% said never.

The final set of questions addressed issues of faith and sources of comfort, in particular from communal prayer and personal prayer. 32 or 82.05% of the respondents identify as persons of faith, and 7 or 17.95% do not. 25 or 64.10% find religion a source of comfort, and 14 or 35.90% do not. 27 or 64.29% find comfort in communal prayer, and 15 or 31.71% do not.

19 or 45.24% attend services a few times a year, 8 or 19.05% attend once a year for the High Holy Days, 7 or 16.67% attend monthly, 5 or 11.9% attend bi-weekly, 2 or 4.76% never attend, and 1 or 2.38% attend weekly.

25 or 62.50% of the respondents find comfort in personal prayer and 15 or 37.50% do not. 19 or 45.25% seldom pray, 10 or 23.81% pray occasionally, 6 or 14.29% pray daily, 5 or 11.9% pray weekly, and 2 or 4.76% never pray.

The final question inquired, “From whom do you seek comfort?” with the opportunity to check all that apply. 36 or 90% of the respondents seek comfort from friends, 33 or 82.5% from family, and 7 or 17.5% from clergy.

B. OBSERVATIONS FROM FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

According to the Worcester Polytech Institute Research methodology guide, “a focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members” (WIT online March 21, 2016). Further, focus groups have been defined as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger and Casey, 2000, p. 5).

The role of the facilitator is to offer participants the opportunity to explore issues with others in a safe, non-judgmental setting. A challenge for the facilitator of focus groups is to create an environment where the participants can complete their thoughts and feelings without interruption. At the same time, the participants are encouraged to seek clear succinct language to fully express their thoughts and feelings while practicing some restraint so they don’t dominate.

I expressed this idea at the first session, *“Tonight I invite you to simply tell your story. And the rules that I would set up are to be as complete as you need to be, but brief as you can be so that everybody has an opportunity to speak.”*

At the second session, I framed it this way, *“If somebody else is speaking, let them finish. I read somewhere and I know I do it too, when somebody else is speaking,*

we're planning our next thought instead of really listening. And this is a time to really practice that listening. It will give each of you the opportunity, when you're speaking, to be listened to as well. I ask the speaker to be expansive and rich and full with your thoughts, but to be as succinct and clear as you can so that everybody has an opportunity. So it's both sides of the same idea that when you're speaking, know that nobody is going to interrupt you, but try to find the essence of what you want to say in as rich a way as possible, but in as few words as possible. And when you're not speaking, really practice that art of listening.

I observed that some participants tended to dominate with a need to comment on everything other participants shared, speaking long and often. Others needed to be drawn out, encouraged to speak with prompts such as, "What do you think?" "Does that resonate for you?" And still others waited and listened quietly, attentively to everyone before sharing rich meaningful personal experiences.

At the sixth and final session I invited participants to reflect on the experience. They spoke with a great deal of gratitude for the opportunity to talk about topics that are not ordinarily addressed in a setting that allowed them to express their thoughts fully without fear of being interrupted or challenged.

DN, who ordinarily "*lives for the moment,*" found himself "*thinking outside of my little square, about life and death.*" SN stated that "*it's nice to have these conversations that we don't usually have with people ... When would we ever sit and have this conversation?*" She loved "*that we had the opportunity to sit here and talk about topics that aren't usually talked about. And it was in a setting where each person gets a chance to talk and be heard and trying not to interrupt.*" AK framed it a little differently.

He found it a *“wonderful experience, because we weren’t taking different sides of an issue debating anything.”*

The participants were also grateful to get to know one another on a deeper level and how they were able to relate to each other. All but two have known one another for many years at Shir Ami services and events and even socializing with each other. RM suggested that it’s not the same *“with meeting each other on the High Holy Days for fifteen minutes before services or fifteen minutes after.”*

SN noted that *“one of the things that amazed me was how much I learned about everybody. I’ve known RM a really long time. KM and I have been in a group where we’ve talked about a lot of things, and I still learned so much.”*

RM pointed out the *“disparity between us individually and yet the silver thread the runs through all of us, expressed differently with slightly different twists based on experiences, but very much of similar views about what this whole merry-go-round is all about.* Elucidating on this thought of disparity-silver thread, he pointed out that *one of the participants has two living parents both in their 90s, another lost her mother when she was a young child, “and yet, there’s so much similarity between the two. There’s some human instinct that get us all thinking in a very similar fashion.”*

AK expressed the silver thread in another way, *“There was almost never an instance when somebody would make a point that I couldn’t relate to in some way,”* And DN summed it up, *“each one of you is really in me and something of each one of you I can identify in myself.”*

Reflecting on the entire experience of participating in the Focus Group, RM concluded, *“I don’t mean to be schmaltzy, but the gift of six or seven two-hour sessions ...*

We can really just sort of throw the rest of the stuff to the side and really think about things, it's pretty powerful, so thanks."

C. UNANTICIPATED RESULTS

In response to hearing my hypothesis that *Baby Boomers whose parents have died are more aware of/informed about their mortality than those whose parents are still living and this impacts their quality of life and the degree to which they embrace the blessings of life* at the sixth and final Focus Group session, the participants talked about how other factors also impact their views about their own mortality and how they live their lives. DN pointed out that *"there are so many variables that you don't account for that can influence one way or another. It's not whether they [your parents] are deceased or not deceased."* SK further suggested that *"we're all affected by other variables. Have you lost close friends at a young age? Things that really make you stop and think."*

Many of the participants pointed out that all experiences with death, whether the loss of parents, grandparents, other close family members, friends, parents of friends, or friends of parents, impact our feelings about our own mortality and how we live our lives.

SK held that *"You could have both of your parents alive, but suffered other tragedies to deal with that could have the same effect."* SN agrees, *"The experiences we had with it [death] and the role modeling we saw, whether it was from a friend who was dying and her view on it, or my parents taking care of my dad's mother. I have both parents, but I don't feel like I'm behind the ape ball at all in embracing life and respecting death."*

Another factor the participants suggested was how our parents' death affects how we approach life has very much to do with our age and stage in life at the time of their

passing. AK shared the story of a friend who *“lost his father when he was fairly young. To him, the significance was, all of a sudden he realized we’re the next generation to die.”* AK explained that she was moving toward retirement when her mother died, and when her father died, she was retired with more time to think about it.

On the other hand, her husband, AK, was at the beginning and development of his career and his career was almost a distraction from his mourning. *“He had so much to do ... So I think that the age of when you lose them [your parents] sort of colors your embracing of life because in my case with my father dying at 94, it suddenly dawned on me, hey, I gotta get things done, I don’t have as much time as I thought. The clock is ticking. And I gotta move here. But if I were 35 or 40, I would see that as a long way down the pike.”*

From the discussions, I observed that the nine participants in the focus group were self-selected individuals who tended to take a positive, embracing approach to life, not necessarily related to their personal experience with loss in general, and loss of their parents in particular. Throughout the six sessions, several themes emerged from our discussions.

In order to analyze and draw conclusions from the focus group sessions, I interacted with the text of the Focus Group sessions six times and was able to increasingly encounter and identify the emergent themes with each interaction. My first interaction was at the sessions when I heard the discussions first hand as they occurred. Second, I encountered the text again when I transcribed each session. Then, with the themes in mind, I read through the transcriptions to mark the quotes that spoke to each theme. I read through the transcriptions yet again from hard copy and with scissors in

hand, cut out the quotes that I planned to use for this write-up. I then read through each cut-out in order to sort them into themes and arrange each group of quotes into a meaningful sequence. I then encountered the text a sixth and final time as I retyped each quote in the context of noting my conclusions and unanticipated results.

Three of the themes were identified by the participants as effecting how one approaches issues of mortality: 1) experience with death, and 2) how raised, and 3) relationship with a living parent after the other dies. Other themes that emerged were 4) fears and concerns about aging and dying, 5) end of life issues, 6) experience with aging as it relates to dying, 7) denial of death / averting death / staying young, 8) burial and mourning practices, and 9) legacy.

Experience with death

The first Focus Group session was, in fact, devoted to the narrative of each participant about their experiences with death and how that might impact their feelings about their own mortality. (See Appendix E) Here are excerpts from the first Focus Group session as well as other sessions that best describe the participants' experiences with death:

SN When I was young, I had a couple of experiences where a friend's mother died. A boy who was a year older died from brain cancer. He got cancer when I was about 9 and he died when I was probably 11 or something. And then also a very good friend of my family lost her two best friends in an accident. So these were things that happened when I was young, and they terrified me. I was really terrified and I remember being young and especially this boy died of brain cancer, and I'd be afraid of going to sleep, that if I saw a flash in the dark or something, I'd think that I was gonna get brain cancer. So it was a scary thing for me.

...then my grandparents, as they passed away, they were all old. They were all in their 80s and 90s so that was easier to deal with because it seemed like they're supposed to die at some point and each one was painful and hard and sad, but it wasn't terrifying. One grandparent died quickly from a heart attack and three died

over a period of time – not terribly long, but one got a diagnosis and within a period of three to four months, died. So I had a chance to sort of say goodbye. So it was sad, but it was ok.

And then over the last couple of years, I've had a couple of friends die...the first one died two years ago, I felt that terrified feeling, very scary, hard to think about it, hard to talk about it. Just was upsetting, very upsetting. Then I read a couple of books about death and one of them – I can't remember the name of it [*Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*], but Eben Alexander is the author, a neurosurgeon who went into a coma and talked about his near death experiences. And it changed how I felt. It felt less scary. So last year when my friend Nancy died who had leukemia and had been up and down for a number of years. It was ... it's like I almost felt that when she finally died, it was like a blessing. And I felt like she was ok, and it didn't feel scary. It felt sad, but it also felt ok. So that was such a difference from a year before when my other friend died and it felt so awful.

KM I was eight years old when my mother died in a car accident that I was witnessing and I remember details. I was in the car. I remember my mother dying. My father had pulled everyone out of the car because he was afraid that it could explode. I was unconscious for that part. I just felt myself lying next to my mother and I remember screaming at her to let me know what to do with my ten-month-old sister who was not responding to anything. I hit her tushy, and I shook her – whatever I could do because I remember this was something I had to do to get somebody breathing again. I was eight at that time. My vivid memory of her death... that I was afraid to touch my mother's hand which was lying right next to me. I was just terrified of it. And we found out, it was of course a shock, but I would always say I was eight years old, and as a child you accept your life the way it is.

RM Your comment about a childhood friend brought back memories of the first person that I realized had died was a classmate of mine when I was seven. And then probably for fourteen years, nobody died... anywhere... ever. I mean all of my relatives were old and my parents would take me to them and they would visit and everybody was fine. My grandmother would live with us for the last fifteen years of her life. She was a complete invalid so she was sitting in a chair or was picked up and used canes and would go to the bathroom and go back to bed and whatever. She passed away when I was a freshman in college of I guess what happens to them when they turn 96. They just kind of, ya know... things give out. Seemed perfectly normal. She was the only grandparent I ever knew.

JM When I was a little girl, maybe 10 years old, I had a friend who... he ended up committing suicide. He had polio. And it was somebody I had grown up with at Beaver Lake... Walter... and he just... One day I just heard that he had killed himself. I was very sad for him, not because he was dead, but how unhappy he should have been to take his own life. But in a way I was slightly relieved for him.

All my other relatives were very old. My mother's father was deaf. He came to this country and then he sort of died. We never went to funeral services. They just sort of went away. And the same with my father's mother, my grandmother. I was in college... I was a freshman and I got a call that Omi had died. It was sad, but it was a different time and my father had put her into a nursing home and she had deteriorated and it was horrific and I was relieved that she was gone, out of her suffering. It was of those times when nursing homes were horrific. I'm sure he was guilt ridden, but there were no options. She couldn't live with us... I don't know. I was also so young that I couldn't wrap my head around it, but she was just gone.

As an adult then my first experience with death was with a friend of mine who ended up dying of AIDS... not that he was gay, but it just turned out by happenstance that his wife had had a lover prior to marrying him who didn't share with her that he was bi-sexual or had encounters and he died, she died and then... he died. They just all died and he was the most heterosexual man I ever knew and I was devastated because I couldn't wrap my heart around the fact that somebody was just taken... it was so unfair. He was so young and so full of life and then he was gone for no reason of anything he did on his own. He wasn't sick. I mean he didn't have an illness. It was just ... that was that.

Finally, as an adult woman, when my mother died, we'd always been very honest with one another, and as I said, I mean, my view of the world, mostly probably informed through her, was that she sort of made me promise that [tearfully] I wouldn't let her suffer. So in a way, if we had been allowed to euthanize our parents, I would have done that. And I kind of feel like I almost did cause we gave her so much morphine so that she could just go already. But that was her wish to me without any doubt about it. She looked me in the eye and she said I do not want to suffer. And I said I will not let you suffer and I do believe in that if there's no option, then go peacefully. Just go. So she did. . I remember very vividly when my mom passed away, the unbearable loss and the ... there was no way to fill the void psychologically or in any way.

- RM John, my college roommate's dad passed away of a heart attack our freshman year, and it was after my grandmother passed away. We were in upstate NY so I and one other of his friends drove over to the house that was an hour from school. And I was absolutely shocked and dismayed. I go into the house and Mrs. Rampy's there. There's no lock on the door, there's no front door; it's just a screen door. Animals are running in and out and relatives are coming over with... they're lugging quarter kegs of beer and lasagna and I'm thinking, are you kidding me? And John sees the horror in my face and he says, Ray, come here. And he introduces me to his Uncle Bob. And Bob says, yeah the family is really big and we're really spread out and the only time we get together is for funerals and weddings. And ya know what? We just drink ourselves silly and party. Because that's... I mean it's not so much the drinking silly, but it's the partying. It's the take advantage of life while you're here. And if the death of somebody is the unfortunate reason why you all get together, mourn for ten minutes at the service, and then party because you haven't seen people for a long time.
- RF I had an aunt who died, my father's sister. We had a relationship. I wasn't attached to her. I was working at summer camp and I came home for the funeral. And I said, Dad, what did she die of? And he said to me, "stupidity," which is interesting because in large part he's doing the same thing now. She was overweight, she was diabetic, she didn't take care of herself. She'd go the doctor, but she didn't do what the doctor said so she had a renal failure and she was obese and basically she didn't have to die.
- SK The day before my father died, he knew this was it. And I said to him, let me get on the next plane. And he said, it's not necessary to be here. I just want to hear your voice. And I want you to hear what I have to say – I love you. That was the last thing I heard. But I'm grateful for that because those words keep reverberating – I love you. Next morning he died.

When my mother died in '07, I was devastated. I mean I sat and I watched her die. And I think my father purposely didn't want me on that plane. He wanted to die on his own terms 'cause he saw what I was like when my mother died.

- FG Well actually my father died in 1995. I was obviously much younger then. And he enjoyed my business at the time. And we had the funeral in the afternoon and I went back to my business and I had an auction that night. In my mind I just saying, well he'd enjoy my doing work and having an auction.

My mother died at 96 about six years ago, and I had taken care of her for six years. She had actually become my very good friend in later years. I never

realized how good a friend she was. We worked together for twenty years after she retired from being a registered nurse. We had a lot of fun. She enjoyed my antiques business and we had a lot of fun. It's hard to lose your parent, your best friend, and someone I relied on in many regards. And I'm still sad.

SK When my mother was dying, there was a point when they thought it was quite imminent, except she showed them. There were nights when I slept at the hospital because my comment was, I don't want her dying alone. She didn't. But there was a part where I believe she was holding on. And when everybody left the room that afternoon, I sat by her bed and didn't know what she heard and what she didn't. And I put my head next to hers and I said to her, I'm gonna be ok. Daddy's gonna be ok. And even Leigh's gonna be ok – my brother. But if you need to leave, go.

SK I stepped out into the hallway, had a good cry for myself, then I heard AK and my son call me back. It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes. She was gone. She slipped away. And I think on some level, she heard us all say it, it was ok to go.

KM When my husband's grandmother died, she was not doing well at all. She was home and she woke up and she said, where's G? And my mother-in-law called G and said, you know I think you should come – these were her words, where's G? And I think you should see her, she might be waiting for you. And so we rushed over to her and she was fast asleep. She never really woke up. But G took her hand and squeezed it, and said, I'm here. And she passed away that night. And she wasn't even close to G. She was really close to her daughter, but you know it was just so nice. It so nice for G to see that meant so much that she needed to ... This was the first time that I really was confronted with an old person passing. And it was meaningful to my husband and I was so happy for him.

SK In our family on my father's side every generation lost a child. My grandmother lost a child during the flu epidemic in 1918. My father was born right after that. My aunt lost a child from measles encephalitis – she was 9-years-old. And my brother lost an infant to SIDS. So the week my father died – my father died on the 12th of February, his daughter's birthday would have been February 14. And I got a text from him. He said, today is my daughter's 14th birthday – oh wait, I don't have a daughter anymore. I mean he has two other children and a child from his wife's first marriage. That was hard. I felt for him "cause that was a hard week for him. It was a hard week for everyone.

SK I lost my first friend when I was 22. He had cystic fibrosis and he was a year or so younger than I was. And I remember going to the funeral and looking around and there were all these kids from the block. And we were all grown up and he never really got there. He was at that point 20. And we all looked at each other and said, this is the first, don't ever forget it. It was shocking. That was a year there were three deaths from that block, two parents and one child.

How raised

The second factor or variable that the participants attributed to their feelings about death and living was how we are raised. RF said that *"you don't approach your own mortality without bringing with you the experience of your family."*

For some, death was not discussed in their families. DN shared that his parents believed that *"you live and you die and that's it. And you continue."* He took the opportunity to write a comment on the survey. *"As a child of Holocaust survivors, death or dying was never discussed at home and was considered part of life cycle. After the initial shock of death my family, myself included, were good in blocking any feelings or memories and we moved on with our life. I believe that it was a self-defense mechanism that my parents developed in order to continue living and raise a healthy family. I for sure inherited this from my parents."*

Also a child of Holocaust survivors, JM described death in her family as *"something that was sad. When you die, that it; it's finished. When my grandmother passed away, I was in college and my parents gave me a phone call and just said she died. I was very close to my grandmother. But there was never a funeral or anything, and they said don't even come back from college. And I didn't and it didn't seem unusual to me 'cause I had not context. Nobody I knew had passed away. I didn't know what the deal was. And so that's how she passed away, and I never understood how my mother's*

father passed away. He just wasn't there anymore. So in my perspective, people just went away and that was that."

JM described her mother's death, *"I was with my mom and she passed away. I went home to my parents' house and my father took one look at me walk through the door and he burst into tears. He was inconsolable. All he had to do was see that I was there and he know it was over. Uch, it was horrible."*

The death of her husband's mother was handled very differently. *"On the day of the memorial service [for my mother-in-law] ... Red was her favorite color, absolute favorite color in everything. So they [her sons] both showed up at the memorial, they had bought bright red shirts which they wore and a red tie in honor of [their grandmother]. And that was their way. They weren't really comfortable speaking. They spoke a little, but to me they were honoring her in their way, and I thought that was really terrific, that was a terrific thing. I feel like ... we're passing on a positive perspective on death. I think you learn that from your parents, or your families. I feel like we're doing one thing right, and that was that."*

For KM death and illness were taboo topics. *"In my family, death was always something that was not discussed; disease was not spoken about. My mother died and I didn't even understand the funeral." On another occasion KM shared that "I remember my mother's funeral very well because we were not told that it was her funeral. I was 8 years old. I just always resented that when I found out that it was my mother's funeral, and we were not part of it as a child. But that was my father's choice as every else that had to do with disease or death."*

And on another occasion, *“My father would never talk about it. The death of my mother was not as horrible as the five years that followed when we were not a family because my father was in a very bad stage.”*

By contrast, KM approached death very differently with her own children. *“When my father-in-law passed away, my son was 18 months, my daughter was 3, and we took them to the service, to the graveyard, and I made sure they would understand somebody passed away because I wanted to be so different from what I was brought up with.”*

AK described his parents with some regrets about their lack of emotion in general and especially in relationship to death. *“I think largely my parents were so void of emotion. They were nice people and they did the best they could with what they had. I can remember very well when my father’s father died years ago, and my aunt would say, ‘your father was so brave at the funeral. He just bit his lip.’”*

RM described his emotional inheritance as one of discomfort expressed through humor. *“My mother’s family is very large, and she was in the middle of the generations, and I am the same way. So there was a lot of seeing elderly people pass away. And my father’s family was much smaller. But nonetheless, both of them reacted with the sensible, serious, but sense of humor that’s clearly ... I mean, that’s what I’m like, more the humor than the sensible part. And when I had to give both of their eulogies, it was a battle to laugh or not cry at times. And I could just see, I got this ridiculous way of communicating sorrow from the two of them. So I think the way I reacted to death was just part of their personality.”*

RM also saw his parents as very sensible in their approach to death and illness. *“From the way I’ve been raised and the people I’ve seen, my whole family, pathetically*

logical, sort of take care of things. And I didn't realize until my dad said, when he was in the advanced stages of prostate cancer, don't bring the kids anymore. Ach, Dad, how can you say that. They're seven and five, and he said, 'cause I don't want to have anything, but his as their last memory of me."

Adding my own experience in, my father used to say, when you're dead, you're dead. It made sense because he was a person who lived this life fully. And that was his point. He lost a daughter and wife to cancer, and he still had this incredible joy in the here and now.

Relationship with one parent after the other dies

Some made the distinction between the experience of losing one parent and the feeling when both parent have died. AK wondered *"if you can really complete mourning for the first [parent] until after the second one is also gone because when you lose the first one, there is the need to take care of the other parent, and be there for the other parent. It's almost like when you lose the second, it's completing the cycle, and you mourn for both of them."*

RM shared his experience with the loss of his father and then his mother. *"My dad was thirteen years older than my mom and passed away three years younger than my mom. So there was a fairly large gap. And when my dad passed away, I said, ok this is pretty crappy. But when my mom passed away, I was an adult orphan. And to me that was just such a powerful major next step, and I could rationalize it [when my dad died]."*

My dad is a little bit older than my mom, but there's still another generation, still somebody else to look up to, and there's still somebody else to tell you all the stories about when you were a kid. And then three years ago I just said there's nobody else who

can tell me anymore. And that really made much more of a change in the way I viewed things than I thought it would. So I think when you're the oldest one in the family, it doesn't make you appreciate life any more than you would have before, but it brings it into such sharp contrast that you almost take another look at everything. And I have a tremendous appreciation for life because my father was older, and I saw what my mother was still able to do. But then when she passed away, it took all the other variables, and all the other 'yeah, buts,' and it's like ok, you're next."

At another session, RM talked about the time he had with his mother after his father died. *"I did an immediate – I better call my mother to see how she's doing for a couple of weeks until finally she said, enough, you don't have to call every night. I'm fine. And then she moved up here and we kind of developed a fairly interesting relationship, more so than when both of my parents had been alive and living in New York City."*

FG also spoke about the relationship with his mother after his father died. *"My mother died at 96, about six years ago [twelve years after the death of his father], and I had taken care of her for six years. She had actually become my very good friend in later years. I never realized how good a friend she was. We worked together for twenty years after she retired from being a registered nurse. We had a lot of fun. She enjoyed my antiques business and we had a lot of fun. It's hard to lose your parent, your best friend, and someone I relied on in many regards. And I'm still sad."*

DN's relationship with his father changed considerably after his mother died as told by his wife, SN. *"His mother died first and that left his dad alone and then he ended up dying a few years later. Whenever DN used to call home, he always talked with his mom. His father hardly ever got on the phone. And although he knew his dad loved him,*

they didn't know how to talk to each other, really. There just weren't conversations. His mother would share with him what happened, what was going on. And he enjoyed hearing stories about what was going on, I'm sure, but he just didn't get on the phone. If he did it was 'Hi, How are you? Goodbye.' That's how fast it was. But when his mom died, all of a sudden that wasn't happening. His father lived in Israel and DN was here and they talked every single day. So they actually became close and became friends. They'd sit and talk and laugh about things every single day. And that would have happened if he had gone first."

The following themes emerged as the group considered how baby boomers, now in their 50s and 60s, relate to their own mortality were not identified by the Focus Group participants, but had a bearing on the discussion: 4) fears and concerns, 5) end of life issues, 6) experience with aging, 7) denial of death / staying young, 8) mourning practices, and 9) legacy.

Fears and concerns about aging and dying

RF came from a family that did not speak about death or attend funerals, and he was fearful of the finality of death. *"The first inkling I had of death was this amazing paranoia of there's never gonna be a tomorrow, ever. I mean it's not like next month or next year, of five years. Like when you're dead, that's it. It's gone and nothing. We never went to funeral services."*

SN had experiences with death at an early age which left quite fearful. *"He [a neighbor] got cancer when I was about 9, and he died when I was probably 11. And then a very good friend of my family lost her two best friends in an accident. So these were things that happened when I was young, and they terrified me. I was really terrified and I*

remember being young and especially this boy died of brain cancer. And I'd be afraid of going to sleep, that if I saw a flash in the dark or something, I'd think that I was gonna get brain cancer. So it was a scary thing for me."

KM, who has vivid memories of the sudden death of her mother in a car crash, expressed her fear of death most directly. *"I am afraid of death, even if I would say I'm not. In the end I am afraid of it because I don't know how it's going to happen and when it's going to happen. I realize that anything that has to do with death actually scares me, or disease, or whatever. And I don't know how to deal with it, I do not know."*

Experience with aging as it relates to dying

Experience with aging in general and with aging parents in particular emerged as equally compelling in relationship to the Focus Group participants' views on their own mortality. SK described the difference between her father and her mother. *"My father inspired me in many ways more than my mother. My mother was very content to just be. She was very much an isolate which my father really wasn't, but he sort of humored her. When she was gone I think as much as he missed her, and he did, he started to realize that he looked at the calendar, and 'I only have a certain number of pages left folks, and I'm gonna make them count.' And at her year's death, he went to Israel. He was 88, almost 89 years old. He went with a group for two weeks. And he said to me, are you hurt that I'm gonna be away for mom's yartzeit? Would the yartzeit of her death be any more meaningful to you if you're alone in the apartment? vs seeing the Wailing Wall and doing all the things you wanted to do? He said, no, and then he came home and he went right into the hospital and had bypass surgery."*

AK described the contrast between his father and SK's father. *"I would say that her [SK] father inspired me, and my father gave me a negative example because my father kept running. He was really like he was running away from age to the point that he didn't care who he trampled on, or who he hurt. Whereas her father showed that it could be done, you could age and remain active and still be a mensch."*

SN experienced the aging and death of a number of close relatives and is now watching with amazement as her parents, 90 and 80-something, are still enjoying life. *"My parents brought my father's mother to come live in their house and they had hospice in the house. And it was something that we all wanted to do to have her close by. Other than the fact that I saw her when she died, she looked scary to me, and I wish I didn't have the image in my mind. But aside from that, it was a very loving experience having her there. And yet my mother, all she ever says is your father and I don't want to be a burden to any of you. They do not want what they modeled for us. They don't want us to have to have it take over our lives. But that's kind of interesting since that's not what they did."*

"And my mother's parents – her father died of a heart attack, and he died within a few days and it was fast. But my grandmother moved from Florida to Texas where her two sons lived, and lived in an assisted living place, had a great time, made tons of friends, played canasta, had a boyfriend even. She was just having a great time, and then she turned 90 and maybe a month later, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and she was dead within five weeks or something. So my mother was going back and forth a lot to be with her in Houston, and the two sons lived there, and the whole family was

there all the time with her. So it's kind of interesting that my mom always says that we don't want to be a burden to you guys. What does that mean?"

RM summed up the experience of aging with a beautiful metaphor. *"To me, the vision is all of those individual traits and characteristics, physical, exertiveness, mental toughness, a lot of tenacity, compassion, are branches on a bush. And as people get old, they start to get woody, and more shoots come out, but when you look at the bush, it's kind of leggy and woody, inflexible, and there's air in the bottom as opposed to it's just a bush that continues to regenerate, it's lush. And I think, yeah I'm starting to see that when I deal with some young kids [when I substitute teach or coach] in high school. My sense of humor doesn't quite cut it because they have no idea what I'm talking about. OK so trim the branch and make it a little more relevant and less brown and woody, and more green and applicable to them."*

End of life issues

The discussion of experience with aging and dying is intrinsically connected to end of life issues. At another Focus Group session KM expanded on her concern about when and where she will die. *"I'm afraid of dying slowly. And I don't want my family to have to make a decision for me. I want to make this decision and I'm very clear on my decision. I do not want anything that prolongs my life."*

Some of the participants expressed fear of the decline of mind and body leading up to death. RF addressed her fears and how her decline could affect her children. *"I probably face my mortality with more of a concern about what will lead up to it. I mean, if I'm gonna be sick, there's probably not a lot I can do about that, but I'm gonna do*

everything I can about it until I can't do anything else about it. And I don't want to burden my children"

SK shared her perception of her father's end of life concerns, *"My father's greatest fear was to die an invalid. His father did, his mother did, his brother, and his sister did. And he died within a week. And I think the smile on his face in some way when I looked at him in the casket was almost as if to say, 'I did it my way, I left this earth on my own terms.'"*

JM conveyed a very accepting view of death with the caveat that it be as comfortable as possible. *"I view death as completely inevitable so I'm totally acceptant of it. I may not like it, but I'm totally acceptant of it. Whenever I have to deal with death in some manner, I just think you have to be respectful of it and make it as easy as possible."* "Making as easy as possible" was her way of expressing her belief in providing relief and assisting in death. *"My mother made me promise that I wouldn't let her suffer. If we had been allowed to euthanasia my parents, I would have done that. That was her wish without any doubt about it. She looked me in the eye and she said I do not want to suffer. And I said I'll not let you suffer, and I do believe in that if there's no option, then go peacefully. Just go. So she did. And now my father has dementia. We should make the people around us as comfortable as they can be at the end stages of their lives so they don't suffer. I don't believe that one needs to suffer at the end. So just help it along, be there, give people comfort. Just sit by their side so they're not alone, that they're not scared."*

There was also conversation among the Focus Group participants about the very practical issues involved in preparing for our declining years and death. SN observed that

“one thing I see is that people who have experienced the death of a parent where they’ve had to be very involved in it are more conscious and aware of the many issues that come up, and so they might look into those protections for themselves, where they might not have if they hadn’t experienced ... a living will, making sure that [they have] disability insurance, long term care. I think once you go through it and see the impact of not having those things, and the difference it made, it can make a person much more aware of what they need to do.”

SN is comforted knowing that her parents, now in the 80s and 90s have everything prepared. *“My parents are really open, organized, communicative about the stuff. Their folder is with everything, and I admire that they are doing it. When I was answering the questions [on the survey], I was ... do we have this?”*

RM was also impressed with his parents’ end of life preparation. *“My dad was unbelievably organized in terms of a living will and all the documentation that you would need. And when my mom was going through her illness, she would always say, you should really know where all the boxes are ‘cause I’m not gonna be able to tell you where they are. And then it dawned on me that parents didn’t do that, or people don’t do that for themselves. They do that to spare the children the aggravation of going through all the crap that they kept for many years.”*

RF is very clear about the importance of planning for the end of our lives. *“I’m the one who says for month and months and months, or years and years, see a lawyer, get the paperwork. She[an aunt for whom RF was the executor] couldn’t talk, but she made it very clear she didn’t want to be in pain. And one sister is saying, ‘just feed her, she’ll be fine. We just have to get her something to eat.’ My other sister disapproved ... is there*

saying, 'send her back to the hospital.' Never mind that she actually told me she didn't want to go. And there is a kitchen full of people screaming at me and someone saying, 'don't wave that piece of paper at me. You're so business-like. Why is it always about business?' And I'm like, 'no, this [feigning to hold up the documentation], is about her speaking.' So they were all screaming at me and she took care of everything; she died in the bedroom, while they were screaming at me. Continuing at the same Focus Group session, "I have the financial stuff all of that organized because I've been around and seen what the alternative is, and it's not pretty."

Denial of death / averting death / staying young

Some of the Focus Group participants talked about denial of death. Although not his only message, RM at one point declared, *"I kind of put it out of my mind and said it won't happen to me."* During another session, RM suggested, *"This whole generation of yah, I'm not gonna get old. And there are middle aged idiots who get their knees fixed so they can continue playing another ten years of soccer. Where a generation ago, it would have been, ok, it's time to sit on the sidelines and let the young people play."*

SK reflected on the idea of moving to a 55+ community. *"I think that when my parents were just about my age, they moved into a 55+ community, and it's something I don't want to do because my father called it 'God's waiting room.'"*

RF takes care of end of life details, but still avoids thinking about mortality. *"I'm somewhat emotionally disconnected from the moment of death. I don't ever think about that, ever. You get life insurance, you get car insurance, you get a will ... I'm detached emotionally from any of that so when I nagged my parents who were brought up in a state of denial, like their parents who came from Europe and had nothing to discuss."*

They don't face it, they don't go to doctors because the doctor doesn't tell you, you have something wrong with you. Then presumably you don't."

SK isn't so much in denial, but feels the urgency to stay young and active. *"I think part of it since I retired, my thoughts are always coming back to how I can make every day count? What can I do to feel that I haven't wasted a day because there's only a finite number left? Keeping active, not just physically active, mentally active. My father had a saying when I retired that God has difficulty hitting a moving target. And he said if you're anything like your father, you better keep busy. I'm picking up things I never found time to do before like learning mahjong. Keeping the brain plastic is really important.*

AK also emphasizes mindset and keeping his mind active in order to stay young as he ages. *"One thing is mindset. I think of myself as young, walking around the condominium area, it's them, not me. I don't think of myself as one of them although I could be. In my own mind I try to keep the same sense of humor, the same interests. I try to stay young and act young. Mindset is a big part of it. The event I went to fifteen years ago where I was in the prime of the group, now I'm the old guy, and I'm gonna do everything I can to stay in the prime."* Continuing this approach to staying young, AK observed that *"after suffering with my father through dementia, I try everything I can to keep my mind active, to try to prevent from ever getting to that. I find myself working really hard keeping my mind active 24/7, I mean constantly thinking, trying to put this together with that. And also I've been listening to a lot of psychology books. I find that even if I'm playing solitaire on my phone, I'm always doing something to keep my mind active."*

RM also agrees that keeping the mind and body active keeps him young. *“I just play games mentally and physically. I started subbing at the high school. And you learn all sorts of new words and new expressions. But it’s just coaching and teaching kids, it’s the ultimate profession where you’re reborn every September with a fresh crop of 16 year olds. I’m getting older and it’s another group of 16 year olds.”*

SN sees her 80 and 90-something year old parents as role models in keeping active and having fun to stay young. *“My dad’s 90 and my mom’s 86 and do a lot of fun things in their life. Their bodies feel like they’re aging in certain ways, but they have not cut back on doing fun interesting things. So they’re really great role models and I definitely feel like over the last couple of years that life should be fun, should be filled with good moments, good things, and so I feel like I’ve been a little more mindful than I was in the past about creating those moments, those situations. And I feel like sort of a voice in my head reminding me to keep creating those and enjoying life.*

FG talked about the importance of self-care in staying young. *“When one is young, one never thinks about these things. When you get older you start thinking of these things, and some people take care of themselves better. And I think it’s a good idea because it’s not just for living longer, but feeling better as you’re living. I think it can’t hurt, but it’s not going to improve your longevity. It’s healthful.”*

SK suggested that some people will do anything to stay young and a discussion ensued about cosmetic surgery. *“There’s a piece of this generation that is looking at the clock and pushing that hand, standing with this clock, pushing the hands back, back. This generation has the greatest number of non-theatrical face-lifts imaginable. It’s enhancements, reductions, get rid of the belly. It’s all plastic surgery, I think with a huge*

part of our generation, which is part of taking those hands of the clock. We equate being attractive with looking younger.”

AK responded to the idea of using cosmetic surgery to stay young. *“I’m not passing judgment and saying right or wrong, but I can say I want to look like a healthy 65-year-old man, but it’s another thing if I say I want to look like a 40-year-old man. We can do plastic surgery and look as young as we want, but we’re not gonna fool the grim reaper.”*

KM had a different take on cosmetic surgery. She suggested a positive outcome in the aging process when you look on the outside the way you feel on the inside. *“Doing some sort of surgery that improves your physical well-being can actually be good for you because emotionally, if you feel this is who I really am ... I’m 65, but I really feel I’m ten years younger. And now with this face, I do look ten years younger so I feel the way look.”*

Burial and mourning practices

The Focus Group participants spoke quite expansively about their experiences with mourning practices. DN was struck by the difference between his memories of sitting shiva in a very traditional manner, growing up in Israel compared with a more liberal approach in America. *“In Israel, when it comes to shiva, they [the visitors] never knock on the door. They just walk in and even just sit down. They don’t say, hi, how are ho? They just sit down and then the conversation starts. Some people just come and sit there for an hour and don’t say one word and leave. But the bereaver acknowledges them if they can appreciate that. And then that’s the end that’s what shiva is all about. This is something that I never felt I the United States. When I came here, I felt like shiva here is,*

I don't know ... I still didn't get used to the custom here after the death of somebody. All the death I had here was related to SN's family, her grandparents. But I just didn't feel.

By contrast SN described the meaningfulness of shiva practices in a liberal US setting. *"The last funeral we went to was when my friend lost her mom. And afterwards everyone went back to her house and they had a spread on the table and people sat around, but I felt like it was very comfortable for my friend. If she had gone home by herself, she would have been really depressed, and instead, she was depressed, but she was telling stories about her mom, she was hearing stories about her mom. Other people showed her pictures. She was just feeling loved by the people that were there. I felt it was a really nice moment."*

AK also finds shiva to be meaningful. *"At shiva I like to feel that my presence has done some good, that I've done something or said something, or just listened, that I've done some good. I also want to be one the ones who's there six months from now, not just today. I want to do something that's meaningful. I remember once I was at shiva. He'd committed suicide and I was sitting with his mother. He was a mature man so she was quite elderly. And I just sat and listened, and afterward she said, Oh was he good, like I said something, and all I did was sit. I mean, what was I gonna say?"*

A common thread in all three descriptions was the comfort that simply sitting there, being present brings to the bereaved. For some the mourning process is more personal and less connected to religious practice. RF points out that from her experience, *"People are not mourning the one who died; they're mourning their own loss on whatever level they feel it. And it becomes very much about the person who is living. And*

sometimes they don't set the feeling aside long enough to consider the person who has died, which I think distorts the entire process. But that's my experience."

By contrast JM suggested that *"if something happens and it's shocking, you can mourn it, there's nothing wrong with mourning, but it doesn't have to be totally devastating."* Some, in fact, like RM, did not observe a formal mourning period at all. *"My dad died at 88. And the next day, as he would want it, I coached a baseball game, and then we went to a birthday party. Just keep going, that was his attitude. And there was not very much sorrow or mourning other than the selfishness of, gee I wish they were still around."*

AK wanted to feel his losses, but returned to his regular activities without any religious mourning practices. *"With my mother, I made up my mind that the only way to get through this experience was to really live it and feel it. And I thought that was pretty healthy. When my father died, because he's gone through the dementia for so long, and because he was who he was, I felt ... We went down to Florida for the funeral, came back, felt pretty low for a day. Then I felt I was pretty much back to normal, still thinking about it, but it wasn't the same like there had been so much that had gone on around it."*

Some of the Focus Group participants had experiences with the mourning practices of other religions. RM was surprised by his experience. *"My college roommate's dad passed away of a heart attack my freshman year. I and one other of his friends drove over to the house. I was absolutely shocked and dismayed. There's no front door. Animals are running in and out and relatives are coming with ... they're lugging quarter kegs of beer and lasagna. And I'm thinking, are you kidding me? And John sees the horror in my face, and he introduces me to his Uncle Bob. And Uncle Bob say, yeah*

the family is really big and we're really spread out, and the only time we get together is for funerals and weddings. We just drink ourselves silly and party."

KM's experience as told to her by a friend was dramatically different from Jewish practice. *"There was a little girl [who was very ill]. She must have been two, maybe three at the most. The parents were from the Netherlands. One of the teachers [at my children's school] was very close with the mother, and had a whole support system bringing in food and taking care of the baby and all that. It was pretty clear that the little girl wouldn't be able to survive and they went back to the Netherlands because there was one more chance that it was possible in Europe. It worked for a few weeks, and then she died. The teacher went over to the Netherlands and went over to the house. She said that it was such a shock to see that little girl in the living room in the corner of the sofa sitting there. She was dead.*

"The whole family came around. They would sit next to her. They would touch her. She said it was such a shock for her, she could not go over the threshold. She just couldn't. It was a shock and she felt like if she could have been prepared, maybe she would have been able to deal with it. The little girl had a baby sister, so she saw one of the cousins running back and forth, throwing toys around in the living room with the little girl sitting there. They posed the body for a day or two."

KM shared another story of mourning practices that she had heard from another source. *"She told me that in Southern Italy they used to put the person on the kitchen table because everybody would always come into the kitchen, and the kids were asked to bite a toe of the dead person to show them, don't be fearful. Nothing will happen, this is normal, this is what you can expect because the worst is fear."*

In response to KM's narrative, FG suggested that there might be some wisdom in what are for us such unusual practices. *"Some religions help [in the mourning process] with having an open wake with the body right there, have in a sense a greater acceptance of death than our Jewish religion. In the Jewish religion, buried so fast, closed casket for whatever reason, closed, be done with it the next day. Whereas, I've gone to many wakes where everybody's very festive, and the person who died is right out there. And they'll walk up and say a prayer ... I think there's greater acceptance in that religion where the body is right there and families are right there and children are right there. And they're observing death, and as they mature and grow up, it's part of life."*

RF also shared her observation of the difference between the mourning practices of Judaism and other religions. *"My first experience was with my aunt when my grandmother was still alive. And this was a real traditional wailing, holding my grandmother back. She wanted to throw herself into the coffin with my aunt. 'Mein Shirley, mein Shirley. And uncles are dragging her back off the thing. Then you go to an Irish wake and they are celebrating the life of somebody. We mourn the death. We cover the mirrors, we beat ourselves. You wear black, you rip things to shreds. God forbid somebody should tell a joke in the room 'cause you can't even let a little happiness slip in, as if it's disrespectful to the dead person. And that's our way, but it's not everybody's way. And the Irish celebrate life. They go and they have a party, and celebrate the person's life ... the completely different perspective. Hundreds of people will show up out of respect for the dead person and for the family and to give comfort. And all of that comfort. And all of that does give comfort so it isn't that they don't mourn. They mourn very differently."*

Legacy

We had meaningful discussions about the significance of legacy. I was fascinated by how this topic emerged organically out of the Focus Group participants' experience with funerals, and the impact that it has had in thinking about how they will be remembered after they are gone. SN shared that *"One of the things that's had a huge impact on me is going to memorial services for my parents' friends. These are people I've known for many years, but I realize I didn't know. And listening to people share stories, their kids sharing stories, their grandchildren sharing stories, their co-workers sharing stories, it's been a really positive experience. And I felt like I learned so much about these people, and I was inspired by them, learning about things they've done. And I've attended most of these things with my parents so I've had in my mind, thinking what my parents are wondering. Will people say such wonderful things about us? And then I think I've even thought about that for myself. Will they say wonderful things about me? The wonderful things we do have an impact and the not wonderful things we do have an impact. And the loving ways we act are remembered and the crazy ways we act are remembered. I've been to a number of funerals and memorial services. I felt inspired by thing I learned that they had done that I didn't know, but it inspired me in life."*

JM had similar experiences. *"I've gone to people's memorial services that I didn't even know, but you hear their wonderful stories about their lives and you think, I wish I'd gotten to know that person. Or I know now why he behaves the way he does because he learned from his family. There's a joyfulness, and it does make you realize that we're obligated, we're here to make the world a better place. And I always try to do*

my little mitzvahs regardless. I would like my legacy to be the little things every day, not the big things.”

RM was also inspired at funerals and memorial services. *“I’m actually learning about the person and how they did things for their children or their friends, and retelling stories. And you think, I should really do that, that’s a really nice thing. I’m becoming a better person by copying what that person supposedly did in his or her life.*

AK pointed out that aging brings on thoughts of legacy, and then reflected on its long term value, well after the eulogies are delivered . *“That’s one of the advantages of aging because you really do start to think about your legacy. What do you really want it to be? The legacy we think about is the one we’re gonna leave in the hearts of our loved ones. Our legacy is not what people are going to say about us in the time of mourning. What real legacy might be is, after I’m gone, did my son or daughter act differently because of the way I influenced them whether or not they even thought about me when they did it. Did a client that I worked with have a better life or a better business whether or not they think of me? I guess our legacies don’t actually have to be spoken or listed.”*

SK voiced the same idea of far reaching legacy when she described an interview she had for a teaching job. *“One of the jobs that I was hired for, the person asked me why did I choose to teach? One of the things that I said was that by teaching I was touching eternity.*

Sometimes the legacy is weighed heavily on the negative side. KM shared such a story. *“My mother-in-law had a boyfriend that nobody could stand. His doctor came and said they asked him to talk. And he said, ‘I really don’t have much good to say because he was just the most difficult person I had. The second I would see him in the room, he*

would curse me out.’ But then he said amazingly, ‘he gave NYU a million dollars. So what can I tell you? I got to be nice about this.’”

KM talked about her hopes and fears for her own legacy. “My immediate family is really important to me. And maybe that part of the legacy because I want them to remember me for whatever reason. That I was a mom I could count on. She would listen to me, she would help me, she was there for me. She can be crazy, too, but these are the things that were good.

After describing a “crazy” response to her ill functioning computer in front of her post-college daughter, she shared her fears about her legacy. “It’s bad enough that I explode, much worse is that my daughter will remember this. And if anything happens to me, this is the last thing she’ll remember, mom going totally nuts over her computer. I’ve never had that before where I was kind of nervous how my misbehavior will actually come out. It’s so much since the kids moved. I’m so much more aware of it. And I don’t want to be remembered like a crazy woman, which I totally am when it comes to things I have no control over.”

Also considering her hopes for her own legacy, SK queried, “How do you remember your mother? How do you remember your father? And that question sometimes reverberates in my head because one day my children are gonna be asked the same question. And I would hope that they said, generous and loving and considerate, unselfish. It’s what I try to be. And that I would want other people to remember me that way.”

DN approached it differently. He just lives in the moment without thinking about his legacy. “I’m not going to worry what they’re going to remember because I usually

aim to do the best thing I can. I just want to have fun and enjoy myself, and enjoy my wife, and enjoy with my children if I can, and the rest will just take place. So I'm not worried about what people will say about me in the funeral, how long after I die they will keep talking about me. I'm not worried about that."

RF chose to take a somewhat humorous approach, although there is a sense that she would like to still be with those she left behind. *"I'm considering planting little notes and them popping out when they [my children] least expect me, just to keep them company."*

RM summed it up. *"To me it is very simply creating memories and that flows into the legacy bit where you just mention it's gonna create or has created a memory that probably will survive at least one more generation beyond your granddaughter. And I think that's to me the real value. One of the most chilling things I heard was, people die three times. You die when you die. You die the second time at your memorial service. And the third time, you die is the last time anybody says your name."*

Regrets – what I wish I had done

In reflecting on the group sessions, I have a few regrets. There are three things I would have done differently or added. First, in Focus Group 2, I would have introduced the session with a different poem. Instead of, or maybe in addition to *It is a fearful thing* by Chaim Stern, which addresses issue of loss, I wish I had included the poem by Alvin Fine, *Birth is a beginning*, which is more about how we embrace life. I don't know how the discussion would have unfolded, but I believe this poem would have engendered conversation about the sacred journey of life, what we do with the years between our birth and our death.

Birth is a beginning,
And death is a destination;
But life is a journey,
A going – a growing
From stage to stage.

From childhood to maturity
And youth to age.
From innocence to awareness
Ad ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion
And then perhaps to wisdom.

From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness –
And, often back again.
From health to sickness
And back, we pray to health again.

From offense to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding –
From fear to faith.

From defeat to defeat to defeat –
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey,
Stage by stage –
A sacred pilgrimage.

Birth is a beginning,
And death a destination;
But life is a journey,
A sacred pilgrimage
Made stage by stage –
From birth to death
To life everlasting.
(Polish p. 138)

Another reading that would have addressed my interest in accepting the reality of our mortality so we can live more fully is found in the following excerpt from *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok. The father who is the rebbe is sharing this wisdom with his son.

Human beings do not live forever ... we live less than the time it takes to blink an eye, if we measure our lives against eternity. So we may be asked what value is there to a human life? There is so much pain in the world. What does it mean to have to suffer so much if our lives are nothing more than the blink of an eye? I learned long ago that the blink of an eye in itself is nothing. But the eye that blinks, that is something. The span of life is nothing. But the man who lives that span, he is something. He can fill that tiny span with meaning, so that its quality is immeasurable, though its quantity may be insignificant. A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life. It is hard work to fill one's life with meaning (Potok 1967, p.217 as quoted in Address, 2012, p.13-14).

My second regret is that I never explicitly invited God into the conversation. In the survey (see Appendix B), 82% of the respondents identified themselves as people of faith (Appendix C), and yet I did not specifically offer the participants the opportunity to consider the place of God in how facing our mortality can result in a more intentional embracing of life. There may have been an unspoken sense of God's presence; discussions of mortality, death, and end of life issues are rich with spiritual overtones. As James Dittes says in *Pastoral Counseling, the Basics*, we were "wrestling with the fundamental religious confrontation between profoundly immortal hopes and stubbornly mortal limitations" (Dittes, 1999, p.24). And, perhaps, just the fact that I am a rabbi facilitating the discussion, for most, creates an unspoken aura that brings God into the room.

And finally, I missed the opportunity for better closure at end of the last session. Some kind of closing ritual would have been helpful and meaningful for the participants to transition from a group that had met almost weekly for six sessions and shared their

deeply personal experiences and supported one another so generously. The participants did express their gratitude for the time spent together and articulated what they had gained from the group experience, but something as simple as asking each participant to hold an object as they spoke their final words and pass to the next speaker could have given ritual form to what happened spontaneously. I believe that the participants experienced a sense of closure with their words of appreciation for the discussions and for the other participants, but a visual, tactile ritual might have deepened the experience.

A positive outcome of the project was the expressed desire of the participants in the Focus Group to continue the conversations. I have put this request into action by scheduling and facilitating a Congregation Shir Ami program entitled “Boomers and Beyond, Sacred Aging.” We are meeting monthly and I will describe this program in greater detail in Chapter 5.

D. TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

While the Focus Group was not a counseling setting per se, which is the construct for transference and countertransference, I definitely experienced countertransference as the participants shared their experiences with death, loss of loved ones, mourning practices, end of life issues, and aging.

Transference is “the process whereby a person projects his or her experiences, impulses, feelings, fantasies, attitudes, conflicts, and defenses arising from relationships with childhood authority figures onto current relationships. Unaware, the person finds her- or himself acting out these indiscriminate, nonselective repetitions of the past and coloring or ignoring reality. The degree to which a person distorts reality reflects the intensity of the pathology (Austad, 2009, p.70).

Countertransference is “transference in the counselor ... the counselor’s transferential reaction to the patient or client” (Wicks, 1985, p.77). “In 1910 Freud wrote: ‘We have become aware of the counter-transference, which arises in him [the therapist] as a result of the patient’s influence on his unconscious feelings, and we are almost inclined to insist that he shall recognize the counter-transference in himself and overcome it’” (Storr, 1989, p.55).

Having lost both of my parents and my sister by the time I was thirty-five, I could not help, but experience countertransference as each participant narrated their personal experiences concerning the loss of loved ones, end of life issues, and death. I live in a world of profound sadness for my losses, and even more than thirty years later, I miss them each and every day. At the same time, I live in a world of profound gratitude for the relationships that I had with each of them and all that I learned from them. I also had my own health detours and brushes with death with a mastectomy and six months of chemo when I was forty-five and a heart attack just four years ago when I was sixty-three.

I found it very insightful on the part of the participants to point out that there are other factors in addition to whether or not your own parents are living or have died in relation to the degree to which we embrace the blessings of life as we consider our own mortality. Enduring the death of loved ones including other relatives and friends, the age at which we experience loss, the way our families deal with loss, and mourning practices, all impact how we live our lives, how we view our mortality. As the conversations unfolded at each Focus Group session, it was both a challenge and a gift not to insert myself and my personal narrative into the discussions.

I related to all the comments, and could easily have contributed fully to the discussion, but I felt my role was to facilitate the conversation, rather than be one of the participants, to encourage, probe, and mostly keep silent as the participants exchanged stories and insights. I gained so much from listening, and while there was an inner dialogue in my head – countertransference – I found holding back and listening with curiosity and compassion, as suggested in the Internal Family Systems Model (Schwartz, 2001, pp.37-40) was beneficial for the participants, as well as for me.

The discussions around mourning practices were particularly fascinating in relationship to countertransference, and confirmed my belief in the wisdom of traditional Jewish mourning practices. I was reminded of the difference between the observance of shiva when my mother died and when my husband's mother died.

My parents had recently moved and were not affiliated with a congregation when my mother died. We found a rabbi in the yellow pages (there was no internet in 1971!) who sat with my family for an extended visit prior to day of the funeral. He truly listened with calm, curiosity, and compassion (Schwartz, 2001, pp.34-40) as we poured our hearts out describing our remarkable mother and wife, and framed a profoundly meaningful eulogy from all that we had shared with him.

What the officiating rabbi missed was explaining the Jewish practice of shiva; he actually never spoke about it at all. So my mother died on a Wednesday, the funeral was the following Sunday, and my father, two sisters, and I returned to work the very next day.

By contrast, when my husband's mother died, his family observed a full week of shiva. The time spent with his sister, brother, and father, sharing memories of growing up

with their immigrant mother, seeking forgiveness and granting forgiveness for childhood hurts, crying, laughing, hugging is a memory I will always cherish. So when my father died, I found great comfort in the Jewish practice of shiva, albeit, not for the full seven days, but for the better part of a week.

I make it a practice, when I meet with grieving families, to offer them the opportunity to observe shiva with an explanation of the traditional approach and the various options available to us as liberal Jews. They are able to make an informed choice about shiva, something I missed when my mother died. This was all part of my inner dialogue when the Focus Group shared experiences with mourning practices.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

A. IMPLICATION FOR RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES

I believe that all religions provide a framework from which to address the issues of human existence, most importantly how we live knowing that death is the ultimate destination for all people. No belief system, no religion or religious practice can “avert the sever decree.” According to sociologists, religion is one of five major elements that always emerge organically in every society: a central government; an economic system; an educational structure; cultural endeavors including music and art; and a religious belief system with accompanying rituals.

While the Pew Research Center 2012 study of religion in America concludes that “the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace with one-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling,” a new

survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, conducted jointly with the PBS television program Religion & Ethics News Weekly, finds that "many of the country's 46 million unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way. Two-thirds of them say they believe in God (68%). More than half say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth (58%), while more than a third classify themselves as "spiritual" but not "religious" (37%), and one-in-five (21%) say they pray every day."

According to Zen Buddhist priest and meditation teacher Lewis Richmond in his book, *Aging as a Spiritual Practice*, "the word 'spiritual' can mean many things. For many people it means their religious faith. Recent polls report that 15% of Americans – some 45 million people – consider themselves unaffiliated with any specific religion, but do value and seek to incorporate spirituality into their lives. That tells me that spiritual experience is a common human value" (Richmond, 2012, p. 19).

In discussing aging as a spiritual practice, Richmond explains the meaning of change in Buddhist thought. "Everything changes. That is the first truth of Buddhist teaching and is the first truth of aging, too. Emotionally this teaching means that everything we love and care about – including our family, friends, and even our precious self – will change, transform, and eventually pass away." "At first blush," he explicates, "this thought might seem depressing, but the process of transformation – aging and its accomplishments – can be very positive, with new possibilities, fresh beginning, a wealth of appreciation, and a depth of gratitude that profoundly affects how our lives proceed" (Richmond, 2012, p. 5).

I agree and shared my thoughts in an essay included in the book *Life, Faith, and Cancer, Jewish Journeys through Diagnosis, Treatment, and Recover*.

“How do we face change in our lives? Do we reject change as an unwelcome stranger, or do we embrace change as an unexpected blessing? We never know what life will hand us, but we do know that change is a fact of life. Change will happen – there is nothing we can do about that. The challenge in life is how we meet these changes, what we do with them. Do we push them away as something unwelcome when they suddenly come upon us? Do we prepare for them and embrace them as a natural part of life? Do we allow ourselves to become transformed by the changes that come our way, ready to embrace the expected and unexpected changes, the welcome and unwelcome changes? Are we prepared and open to see the changes in our lives as blessings from God? (Axe, 2008, p. 126).

Judaism takes a very pragmatic approach to death. In *A Jewish Mourners Handbook*, Rabbis Ron H. Isaacs and Kerry M. Olitzky suggest that “Judaism bids us to face death realistically. Death is part of everyday life, and it is important to face it with honesty. This realistic view of death and preparation for it during one’s life is a well-known motif that pervades the entire Jewish tradition” (Isaacs and Olitzky, 1991, p. 13). Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman expands on this idea in her discussion of the Jewish view of afterlife. “The departed ... live on earth in the deeds of goodness they have performed,” she quotes from *Union Prayerbook*, published by the CCAR in 1940, “and in the hearts of those who cherish their memories” (Friedman, 2015, p. 23).

I learned from the Focus Group that one factor in how we view our mortality is very much influenced by how we were raised. The Jewish view of death resonates for me from both learning and experience. My father lived and died with the outlook that death is part of life. “When you’re dead, you’re dead,” he noted with neither resignation nor fear, just as a fact. My sister’s final days were profoundly impactful, as well. Her breast cancer had metastasized to her spine and she spent the last few weeks of her life in the hospital unable to walk. A large group of doctors on rounds gathered around her bed just

days before her death, and when asked if she was afraid, she spoke with great effort from the depths of her body to explain very calmly and serenely that she was not at all frightened, that death is part of life. Her head was shaven and one eye would no longer open as a result of surgery to her brain as an effort to arrest the progress, and the rounding doctors were visibly repelled by her appearance and other worldly voice and moved by the serene acceptance of her impending death.

Another aspect of the Jewish approach to death is the sense of incompleteness we feel as we know our days are numbered. “No matter how intentionally we live our lives, we can never complete every task or reach every goal or potential. We learn this lesson quite poignantly from the biblical depiction of Moses. Moses, who dedicated the last third of his life to the project of redeeming his people from slavery, did not manage to reach the Promised Land with them. Like Moses we will die with one or many aspects of our lives unfulfilled” (Friedman, 2015, pp. 24-25).

Moses accepted his divinely-designed fate, and while we bargain with God to live long enough to see our child wed, our grandchild “Bar or Bar Mitzvahed,” we know from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 that “to everything there is a season, a time to be born and a time to die.”

In Chapter 2, I noted my observation of the many themes of the High Holy Days which are metaphors for life and death, engaging in several simulated near death experiences each year as we gather for the Ten Days of Repentance. The Binding of Isaac, Genesis 22:1-19 is read Rosh Hashanah morning, the Shofar Service also Rosh Hashanah morning, the intoning of *Unetaneh Tokef*, and the Yizkor Memorial Service all suggest the fragility of our lives and confrontation with our mortality.

“On Yom Kippur,” agrees Rabbi Dayle A Friedman in his book, *Jewish Wisdom for Growing Older*, Jews not only contemplate death, we practice dying, abstaining for twenty-five hours from food, water, sex, and physical pleasure and dressing in simple white like the shrouds in which Jews are traditionally buried. We are drawn into encounter with our mortality precisely to inspire us to live our limited days as well and fully as we possibly can (Friedman, 2015, p. 26)

B. IMPLICATION FOR CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

Fear of Death

Over the course of the Focus Groups, it became clear to me that the participants were very articulate in their discourse about many aspects of their mortality except one. They were able to speak about their experience with the death of loved ones, childhood friends, parents, relatives. They were able to speak about stages leading up to death including fear of their physical and mental decline and ways to maintain their youth. They were able to speak about mourning practices and economic preparation. But they never spoke directly about their own mortality.

Upon further study, their resistance to speak about their own death is consistent with the findings postulated by the psycho-clinical world. “Fear of death,” notes Ernest Becker, a PhD in Cultural Anthropology, “is a universal in the human condition. The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainstream of human activity – activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man” (Becker, 1973, p. xvii).

“Of all things that move man,” he further elucidates, “one of the principle ones is his terror of death ... many thinkers immediately saw that it was a major psychological

problem for man” (Becker, 1973, p. 11). He concludes that “The fear of death is natural and is present in everyone; it is the basic fear that influences all others, a fear from which no one is immune, no matter how disguised it may be” (Becker, 1973, p. 15).

Rabbi Dayle Friedman agrees. “We avoid contemplating our mortality because we are, most of us, terribly afraid of dying.” She goes on to describe how our culture offers alternatives to confronting our mortality. “Our death-denying and death-defying culture magnifies this abhorrence of mortality. Death is shunted aside, cloistered in the world of hospitals and funeral homes. Fantastically lucrative industries sell us myriad products to prevent ourselves from showing our aging, lest we come face-to-face with the ultimate destination of later life. Vast medical resources are invested in futile interventions for patients who have no reasonable hope for survival, because physicians, patients, and families cannot talk about or accept death” (Friedman, 2015, p. 22).

In contemplating the universal phenomenon of fear and denial of death, I considered the possibility of a connection between Object Relations Theory and fear of death as the fear of annihilation, impingement and abandonment. As we vanish from existence completely and forever, we lose the comfort of all objects and relationships that provided a holding environment throughout our lives.

Taking his conclusions from the works of John Bolby, Walter Teitz, J.C. Rheingold, A.J. Levin, and J.C. Maloney, as well as his own work, Ernest Becker, in his book *The Denial of Death*, affirmed my thoughts.

If a child has no knowledge of an abstract idea like absolute negation, he does have his own anxieties. He is absolutely dependent on his mother, experiences loneliness when she is absent, frustration when he is deprived of gratification, irritation at hunger and discomfort, and so on. If he were abandoned to himself his world would drop away, and his

organism must sense this at some level; we call this the anxiety of object-loss.

Isn't this anxiety, then, a natural, organismic fear of annihilation? Again, there are many who look at this as a very relative matter. They believe that if the mother has done her job in a warm and dependable way, the child's natural anxieties and guilts will develop in a moderate way, and he will be able to place them firmly under the control of his developing personality.

The child who has a good maternal experience will develop a sense of basic security and will not be subject to morbid fears of losing support, of being annihilated, or the like. As he grows up to understand death rationally by the age of nine or ten, he will accept it as part of his world view, but the idea will not poison his self-confident attitude toward life. The psychiatrist Rheingold says categorically that annihilation anxiety is not part of the child's natural experience, but is engendered in him by bad experiences with a depriving mother.

This theory puts the whole burden of anxiety on the child's nurture and not his nature. Another psychiatrist, in a less extreme vein, sees the fear of death as greatly heightened by the child's experiences with his parents, by their hostile denial of his life impulses, and, more generally, by the antagonism of society to human freedom and self-expansiveness (Becker, 1973, pp. 13-14).

Friedman agrees. "Dead is dead," she declares, "the only existence we have is that during our physical life span. It can be terrifying to sense that the self we have developed over our lifetime will simply cease to be. Like a child who doesn't want to go to bed when there is company – We fear missing out – on juicy experiences, on relationships, on visions yet to be realized. We want to be around to see how it will all turn out" (Friedman, 2015, pp. 23-24).

Erica Brown in her book, *Happier Endings, a Meditation on Life and Death*, offers a similar postulation. "Not all of us get the death warning with enough time to tie everything up nicely in a bow, especially with sudden deaths. And it's not only finances that need tying up. It's the emotional odds and ends of a life that may need healing or

repair. It's all the dreams and ambitions you held on to that may or may not get fulfilled. Death is more than the end of life. It is the annihilation of wishes and unrequited longings. It is the end of a conversation. It is final" (Brown, 2013, p. 178).

Facts about aging

One cannot address issues of our mortality without considering the years leading to our death. "The proximity of old age to death is not only undefiable but undeniable" (Jacoby, 2011, p. xiii). With seventy million baby boomers in their fifties and sixties, aging research is a "booming" field (Richmond, 2012, p. 8). Susan Jacoby goes on to coin the new descriptive terms for old age. Those in their 60s and 70s are the "young old," and those in their 80s and 90s are the "old old" (Jacoby, 2011, p. 5)

Lewis Richmond suggests that "we need to look afresh at this prospect of a longer life and ask ourselves, What's the best use of this extra gift of time? (Richmond, 2012, p. 13). He postulates four Stages of Aging:

Lightning Strikes The dominant emotion is surprise. We are taken aback to realize, "I'm really growing old," and then surprised at how long it took us to see it.

Coming to Terms takes hold when we compare ourselves with how we once were – favorably or unfavorably. We look back at the "old me" and see how it measures up against the "new me." If we like being the age we are now, that comparison brings happiness; if we don't, it leads to regret.

Adaptation come when we no longer compare ourselves to the past and can rest in the age we are now.

Appreciation comes when adaptation matures into full acceptance.

While engaged in avoidance of facing our mortality, we spend a great deal of energy on the fear of aging and the physical and mental decline that will

emerge in our final years. “Many of us are profoundly afraid of how we’ll get there [to our death]. We do not want to suffer. We fear pain – we are not at all sure how much we can bear. We may also worry that we will lose our dignity” (Friedman, 2015, p. 24).

Rather than face the inevitable, we are compelled by our culture to do everything we can to feign youth and avoid the topic altogether. “To avoid our fears of dying, we endeavor to distract ourselves. We pour ourselves into endless work, we seek pleasure excessively, or we become obsessed with maintaining a youthful appearance” (Friedman, 2015, p. 25).

Susan Jacoby agrees as she describes the phenomenon of ageism in America, “the prejudicial and irrational exaltation of youth that devalues the wisdom, productivity, and usefulness of those who have lived beyond the biblical three score and ten” (Jacoby, 2011, p. 8) “Dwelling on the inevitable losses of old age,” she suggests, “is considered a form of depression, to be treated in every case rather than respected, in some instances, as a realistic response to irremediable trouble, pain, and loss” (Jacoby, 2011, p. 6).

“The very word “old,” she posits, “is seen as an expression of prejudice rather than a factual description of a stage of life” (Jacoby, 2011, p. 5). “American culture,” she continues, “now exalts old people vigorous enough to shatter the stereotypes of the 1950s, but the fact that more people are managing to do so has driven us deeper into denial about the severe physical and mental infirmities associated with the oldest phases of old age” (Jacoby, 2011, p. 8).

Jacoby suggests a culturally acceptable path to what she calls “successful aging.” “Successful aging means that a person has managed to put on a happy face for the rest of the world; present an image of vigor and physical well-being even when bones are aching; smile even though a heart may be breaking with loss; do everything possible to conceal memory lapses; demonstrate a consistent willingness to try anything new; and scoff at those misguided contemporaries who refuse to “live in the present” (Jacoby, 2011, p. xii).

“Here’s what one cannot do,” she continues, “and be considered a person who is aging successfully: complain about health problems to anyone younger; weep openly for a friend or lover who has been dead more than a month or two; admit to depression or loneliness; express nostalgia for the past (either personal or historical); or voice fear of future dependency – whether because of poor physical health, poor finances, or the worst scourge of old age, Alzheimer’s disease (Jacoby, 2011, p. xii).

After these somewhat tongue-in-cheek, culturally-founded definitions of successful aging, Jacoby goes on to suggest a path to “aging with dignity.” “The capacity to negotiate between the past and the present, not transcendence of the emotions and desires that have made us who we are, is the proper definition of aging with dignity” (Jacoby, 2011, p. xiii).

In a culture proud of all the means available to us for allowing us to approach our final years with youthful zest, Jacoby suggests that we abandon these false notions and wear our age with pride and dignity. “Americans ought to think about making ninety not the new fifty but a better ninety than can be

expected today. Furthermore, we need to pay less attention to expensive fantasies – from unending organ transplants to bionic replacements of every body part – to extend longevity for the few who will be able to afford such costly anti-aging measures and concentrate on improving the lives of the many who are ill-clothed, ill-housed, and ill-fed as soon as they are no longer able to hold a full-time job” (Jacoby, 2011, p. 29).

Lewis Richmond addresses issues of ageing as “the Science of Healthy Aging.” In much of today’s world, people are living longer than they ever have. The life expectancy at the turn of the [last] century was forty-five; now it is eighty. Living into one’s eighties, nineties, and even past one hundred is a real possibility today, one that makes your fifties and sixties a time not for winding down but for gearing up – for what, we may not be sure (Richmond, 2012, p. 13).

Reflecting my belief that we choose how we respond to life’s challenges, he shared the following conversation. “One of my workshop attendees raised his hand and half-jokingly said, ‘I’m fifty eight and I know where I’m headed – downhill. It’s all downhill from here.’ I thought for a moment and replied, ‘Well I’m not sure I agree, but even if you’re right, the real question is: Are you going to just slide, or are you going to steer?’” (Richmond, 2012, pp. 9-10).

Erica Brown in her book, *Happier Endings, a Meditation on Life and Death*, offers Viktor Frankl’s views on survival which she likens to how one approaches ageing. “Viktor Frankl speaks famously of unfinished business as a rationale for survival in a book often cited as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century, *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

“His central thesis, born out of both research and personal experience as a Holocaust survivor, is that the people who stand the greatest chance of survival are those who have goals to achieve, projects to finish, people to see. It matters less what the direct object of survival is – in other words, why someone needs to do a particular something; what matters is the drive to do *that* thing. Often people who have a reason to live or a sense of meaning in their lives can actually muster the ambition to survive circumstances that would easily swallow those without the same drive. It is not a guarantee, just a strong motivator” (Brown, 2013, pp. 178-179).

“Part of dying well,” Brown suggests, “is the decision to stop fighting when it’s time to accept the reality of death. Society admires the hope and resoluteness of those who try everything to stop aging and terminal illness, from trying fad diets to alternative healing ceremonies. Some people’s will to live is so strong that they will try virtually anything to live another day. The problem with the fighting spirit is that it can get in the way of acceptance and resignation, which allows people to do what they want to end their lives rather than in aggressive bouts of battling for more time. It ushers in the stage of resignation and helps prepare people for the stage of inspiration” (Brown, 2013, pp. 169-177).

As I stated in Chapter 2, human existence has a beginning and an end, and if we can accept the raw truth that life is finite, that at the appointed time we will die, then we can live more fully. Brown agrees. “Confronting the deaths of those we love and facing our own mortality are among the most poignant and frightening steps on life’s journey” (Brown, 2013, p.5).

“The intentional decision to become better prepared for death gives the dying permission to love more fully, to say the words they’ve wanted to say for a lifetime, to repair and heal troubled relationships, and to entertain a range of ethereal and spiritual thoughts and actions often previously closed off, sealed or masked by the pragmata of everyday anxieties” (Brown, 2013, p.7).

The Focus Group participants concluded that our view of human mortality reflects how we were raised, and Brown suggests that “the more open we are about our own deaths, the more prepared our survivors will be to face their own ultimate truths one day” (Brown, 2013. p. 6).

Friedman also proposes the positive outcome of accepting our mortality rather than living in a state of fear and denial. “We are all aware that we will not live forever. By midlife, we’ve seen people we love leave this world. And yet ... and yet ... there is some profound way in which we simply do not believe that this will happen to us. Or perhaps we believe it, but we cannot accept it. We avoid facing the reality of our mortality. We are afraid.

“Paradoxically, confronting our own dying can be the opening to living fully for whatever days, months, or years remain. Like a hike up a steep and rocky path that opens up to an unexpectedly magnificent vista, challenging ourselves to acknowledge and face mortality enables us to fill our moments with intensified vividness” (Friedman, 2015, p. 22).

Continuing this theme, Friedman postulates that “keeping our mortality in mind can impel us to live with as much intentionality, goodness, and zest as is humanly possible. We hold the paradox of living vividly, with death in view.

Facing our own death sets the agenda for the rest of our life. It helps us identify the unfinished business of the past and the callings of the future. Facing dying enables us to grow older with wisdom and intentionality (Friedman, 2015, p. 25).

“The call of life in the face of death,” she further suggests, “is to be honest, true, and present. The unlived life invites us to embrace, to complete, to reach. Since we know that we will die but cannot know when, should we not make this day which could be our last, as full and rich as possible? In this precious, finite time we have, we must seize joy and savor it” (Friedman, 2015, p. 29).

If, as Richmond suggests, the final stage of growing old after 1) lightning strikes, 2) coming to terms, and 3) adaption is 4) appreciation, then perhaps the true reward of confronting and accepting our mortality without denial and fear is living our “young old” and “old old” years in a world of joy and gratitude.

“Gratitude, with no complaints,” he states, “is the attitude that I would like to have, not only at the end of my life, but from now until then” (Richmond, 2012, p. x).

C. WIDER CONTEXT

Interest in organized conversations about death and human mortality has grown in recent years as the members of the boomer population have reached the age of 65+. One such group is Death Cafés. According to their website, Death Cafés began in 2010 when Jon Underwood, a British Web designer and self-named "death entrepreneur," decided to develop a series of projects about death, one of which was to focus on talking about death.

The first Death Café in the UK was offered in Jon's house in Hackney, East London in September 2011. It was facilitated by psychotherapist Sue Barsky Reid, Jon's mother. It was well received and they went on to offer Death Cafés in a range of places including funky cafes, people's houses, cemeteries, a yurt and the Royal Festival Hall.

According to the website, a Death Café is a group directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives, or themes. It is a discussion group rather than a grief support or counseling session. People, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea, and discuss death. They are always offered on a not for profit basis in an accessible, respectful, and confidential space with no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product, or course of action, alongside refreshing drinks and nourishing food – and cake! The objective is to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives. (Death Café. <http://deathcafe.com/>).

Jon found that "When people sit down to talk about death, the pretense kind of falls away, and people talk very openly and authentically. And they say things in front of strangers which are really profound and beautiful" (Prichep, <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/08/173808940/death-cafes-breathe-life-into-conversations-about-dying>).

Based on the methodology they developed, Jon and Sue produced a guide for running a Death Café. Published in February, 2012, hundreds of people have worked with the founders to provide Death Cafés across the globe from Columbus, Ohio to San Francisco to Eastern Australia. As of today there have been Death Cafés in 32 countries across the globe (Death Café. <http://deathcafe.com/>).

In an interview with NPR Jon described some experiences. “It's mostly aging boomers, but not entirely. There's a couple on a date. And [one participant] brought her 7-year-old son to talk about the death of his great-grandmother.” “When we acknowledge that we're going to die,” he explained, “it falls back on ourselves to ask the question, ‘Well, in this limited time that I've got, what's important for me to do?’” Underwood says.

As the death cafe movement expands, talking about everything from advanced care directives to grieving rituals, it ends up being about not so much how we die but how we live.” (Prichep, <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/08/173808940/death-cafes-breathe-life-into-conversations-about-dying>).

D. THE FUTURE

My experience with the Doctor of Ministry Project Focus Group was the same as Jon Underwood’s experience with his Death Cafés. It became clear from many comments by the participants that the opportunity to discuss issues of death and ageing was profoundly life-affirming and they expressed interest in future opportunities to continue the conversation. In response I created a monthly a discussion group called, *Boomers and Beyond, Sacred Aging, monthly conversations for the third act of life* (see Appendix J for flyer and press release).

For the DMin Project I invited only boomers as defined by sociologists, born between 1946 and 1964, to participate by responding to the survey and attending the Focus Group. There were people born earlier and later who asked if they could participate, but for the purpose of creating a meaningful study for the project, I had to maintain the age limit. However, for the discussion group, there was no need to set

boundaries so I named the monthly conversations “Boomers and Beyond” by way of inviting anyone who felt compelled to participate, regardless of age.

I scheduled nine monthly sessions, October –June, and am facilitating all conversations with guest speakers lined up for four of the nine months. The speakers are Rabbi Richard F. Address, founder of Jewish Sacred Aging, Todd Marschall, a financial advisor, Jeff Graham, founder of Transplant Support Organization, and Nancy Collamer, a Second Act Career coach (see Appendix J for more information about each speaker).

We have currently had three sessions. For the opening sessions, I opened the conversation with two readings from *Seekers of Meaning, Baby Boomers, Judaism, and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging* by Rabbi Richard F. Address. The first was a reading from Ecclesiastes 1:4-9:

One generation goes, another comes,
But the earth remains the same forever.
The sun rises, and the sun set –
And glides back to where it rises.
Southward blowing,
Turning northward,
Ever turning blows the wind;
On its rounds the wind returns.
All streams flow into the sea,
Yet the sea is never full;
To the place [from] which they flow
The streams flow back again.
All such things are wearisome:
No man can ever state them;
The eye never has enough of seeing,
Nor the ear enough of hearing.
Only that shall happen
What has happened,
Only that occur
Which has occurred;
There is nothing new

Under the sun!
(Address, pp. 12-13)

And the second was a selection from Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*:

Human beings do not live forever ... we live less than the time it takes to blink an eye, if we measure our lives against eternity. So we may be asked what value is there to a human life? There is so much pain in the world. What does it mean to have to suffer so much if our lives are nothing more than the blink of an eye? I learned a long time ago, that the blink of an eye in itself is nothing. But, the eye that blinks, that is something. The span of life is nothing. But the man who lives that span, he is something. He can fill that tiny span with meaning, so that its quality is immeasurable, though its quantity may be insignificant. A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life. It is hard work to fill one's life with meaning (Address, pp. 13-14).

At the second session I invited conversation in response to copies of photographs by Tom Hussey from his portfolio called "Reflections." Each photograph is a portrait of an ageing person seeing their younger self as they view their reflection in a mirror (<http://www.tomhussey.com/PROJECTS/REFLECTIONS/thumbs>). (see Appendix K)

For the third session, I had the privilege of inviting Rabbi Richard F. Address as guest speaker who so warmly and generously shared his wisdom and insights from his work in Jewish Sacred Aging.

E. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As I reflect on this DMin Project, I realize that my hypothesis needs to be revised to reflect the outcome of the sessions with the Focus Group, as well as the accompanying research. I am able to conclude that whether our parents are living or have died is not the compelling factor in how we live our lives. It is the encounter with the reality of our mortality.

In *The Things They Carried*, a semi-autobiographical collection of short stories by Tim O'Brien in which he describes the character defining things that each of the members of his platoon in the Vietnam War carried in their knapsacks, he observes that "You're never more fully alive than when you're almost dead."

This idea is implicit in the findings of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist and pioneer in near death studies who observed that "It's only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth – and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up – that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had" (Kubler-Ross <http://www.ekrfoundation.org/quotes/>).

"We bring a deeper commitment to our happiness," she further elucidates, "when we fully understand, that our time left is limited and we really need to make it count" (Kubler-Ross *Life Lessons*, 2000). "It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we're alive – to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are" (Kubler-Ross *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*, 1975).

I went into the project with the supposition that "Baby Boomers whose parents have died are more aware of/informed about their mortality than those whose parents are still living and this impacts their quality of life and the degree to which they embrace the blessings of life." I emerge from this journey with a revised notion that "human existence has a beginning and an end, and if we can accept the raw truth that life is finite, that at the appointed time we will die, then we can live more fully, joyously embracing the blessings of our lives."

Appendix A: Survey Email

Dear Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) –

I am working on my Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling (DMin) at Hebrew Union Jewish College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and need your help. I have completed two years/four semesters of graduate level class work plus 300 hours of supervised clinical work and am now preparing my Final Demonstration Project. My topic is:

Baby Boomers Confront their Mortality:

A comparison of those whose parents are living and those whose parents have died

If you are a Baby Boomer, born between 1946 and 1964, please fill out the survey that I created by going to **<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MHN7QDM>**. There are 60 questions in the survey, which should take less than 30 minutes to complete.

If you are not a Boomer, please DO NOT fill out the survey.

The last question offers an opportunity to be part of a focus group which will meet for six sessions at a mutually convenient time during the summer months. Even if you can't participate in the focus group, please complete the survey – the more respondents I have, the better data I will have from which to draw conclusions. You can access the survey by going to **<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MHN7QDM>**.

Please forward this email to any Boomers you know who might be interested in exploring this issue.

To learn more about the DMin Program at HUC-JIR, go to <http://huc.edu/academics/degree-programs/become-pastoral-counselor>.

Please call or email with any questions -
Blessings and thank you in advance for your help

Appendix B: Survey Questions

from Survey Monkey pdf Boomer Survey

1. Please tell me about yourself. (Questions 1-10)
2. What is your gender?
3. In what year were you born? (enter 4 digit birth year; for example, 1976)
4. What is your current age?
5. In what city were you born?

*

Name:
Company:
Address:
Address 2:
City/Town:
State: ▼
ZIP:
Country:
Email Address:
Phone Number:

*

*

Female

☐ ☐ ☐

Male

☐ ☐ ☐

50

☐ ☐ ☐

51

☐ ☐ ☐

52

☐ ☐ ☐

53

☐ ☐ ☐

54

☐ ☐ ☐

55

☐ ☐ ☐

56

☐ ☐ ☐

57

☐ ☐ ☐

58

☐ ☐ ☐

59

☐ ☐ ☐

60

☐ ☐ ☐

61

☐ ☐ ☐

62

☐ ☐ ☐

63

☐ ☐ ☐

64

☐ ☐ ☐

65

☐ ☐ ☐

66

☐ ☐ ☐

67

☐ ☐ ☐

68

☐ ☐ ☐

6. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Less than high school degree

☐ ☐ ☐

High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)

☐ ☐ ☐

Some college but no degree

☐ ☐ ☐

Associate degree

☐ ☐ ☐

Bachelor degree

☐ ☐ ☐

Graduate degree

☐ ☐ ☐

***7.** Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

Management Occupations

☐ ☐ ☐

Business and Financial Operations Occupations

☐ ☐ ☐

Computer and Mathematical Occupations

☐ ☐ ☐

Architecture and Engineering Occupations

☐ ☐ ☐

Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Community and Social Service Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Legal Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Education, Training, and Library Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Healthcare Support Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Protective Service Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Personal Care and Service Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Sales and Related Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Office and Administrative Support Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Construction and Extraction Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Production Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Transportation and Materials Moving Occupations
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
 Other (please specify)

8. How many brothers do you or did you have?

9. How many sisters do you or did you have?

10. What your ordinal position in your family of origin?

11. The following questions are about your mother.

In what year was she born? (enter 4 digit birth year; for example, 1976)

12. Is your mother living or has she died?

*

*

*

*

0

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

1

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

2

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

4

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Please explain if brother(s) deceased

▲ ☐

▼ ☐

0

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

1

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

2

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3

☐ ☐ ☐

4

☐ ☐ ☐

Please explain if sister(s) deceased

☐

☐

Oldest

☐ ☐ ☐

Middle

☐ ☐ ☐

Youngest

☐ ☐ ☐

Only child

☐ ☐ ☐

My mother is living (please answer questions 1318)

☐ ☐ ☐

My mother has died (please answer questions 1925)

☐ ☐ ☐

13. If she is living, what is her current age?

14. How is her mental health?

15. How is her physical health?

16. Where is she living?

17. Who is the primary caregiver?

Excellent

☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐

Additional Comments

☐

☐

Excellent

☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐

Additional Comments

☐

☐

Home independently

☐ ☐ ☐

Home Custodial Care (nonprofessional assistance)

☐ ☐ ☐

Home Health Care (part-time professional assistance)

☐ ☐ ☐

Senior Housing

☐ ☐ ☐

Assisted Living Facility

☐ ☐ ☐

Skilled Nursing Care

☐ ☐ ☐

Hospice

☐ ☐ ☐

Other (please specify)

You

☐ ☐ ☐

Other family member

☐ ☐ ☐

Nonfamily

member

☐ ☐ ☐

Other (please specify)

18. How often do you visit her?

19. If she has died, what was the year of her death? (enter 4 digit year of death; for example, 1976)

20. What was her age at the time of death?
21. What was your age at the time of her death?
22. What was the cause of her death?
23. What was the length of her illness?
- Daily
☐ ☐ ☐
- 23
 times/week
☐ ☐ ☐
- Weekly
☐ ☐ ☐
- 23
 times/month
☐ ☐ ☐
- Monthly
☐ ☐ ☐
- Other (please specify)
 Her death was sudden
☐ ☐ ☐
- 36
 Months
☐ ☐ ☐
- 612
 Months
☐ ☐ ☐
- 12
 Years
☐ ☐ ☐
- 24
 Years
☐ ☐ ☐
- Other (please specify)
24. Where was she living?
25. Who was the primary caregiver?
26. The following questions are about your father.
 In what year was he born? (enter 4 digit birth year; for example, 1976)
27. Is your father living or has he died?
28. If he is living, what is his current age?
29. How is his mental health?

★

- Home independently
☐ ☐ ☐
- Home Custodial Care (nonprofessional assistance)
☐ ☐ ☐
- Home Health Care (parttime professional assistance)
☐ ☐ ☐
- Senior Housing
☐ ☐ ☐
- Assisted Living Facility
☐ ☐ ☐
- Skilled Nursing Care
☐ ☐ ☐
- Hospice
☐ ☐ ☐
- Other (please specify)
 You
☐ ☐ ☐
- Other family member
☐ ☐ ☐
- Nonfamily member
☐ ☐ ☐
- Other (please specify)

My father is living (please answer questions 2833)

My father has died (please answer questions 3440)

Excellent

Good

Fair

Poor

Additional Comments

▲
▼

30. How is his physical health?

31. Where is he living?

32. Who is the primary caregiver?

33. How often do you visit him?

Excellent

Good

Fair

Poor

Additional Comments

▲
▼

Home independently

Home Custodial Care (nonprofessional assistance)

Home Health Care (parttime professional assistance)

Senior Housing

Assisted Living Facility

Skilled Nursing Care

Hospice

Other (please specify)

You

Other family member

Nonfamily member

Other (please specify)

Daily

23 times/week

Weekly

23 times/month

Monthly

Other (please specify)

34. If he has died, what was the year of his death? (enter 4 digit year of death; for example, 1976)

35. What was his age at the time of death?

36. What was your age at the time of his death?

37. What was the cause of his death?

38. What was the length of his illness?

39. Where was he living?

His death was sudden

☐ ☐ ☐

36

Months

☐ ☐ ☐

6-12

Months

☐ ☐ ☐

12

Years

☐ ☐ ☐

24

Years

☐ ☐ ☐

Other (please specify)

Home independently

☐ ☐ ☐

Home Custodial Care (nonprofessional assistance)

☐ ☐ ☐

Home Health Care (parttime professional assistance)

☐ ☐ ☐

Senior Housing

☐ ☐ ☐

Assisted Living Facility

☐ ☐ ☐

Skilled Nursing Care

☐ ☐ ☐

Hospice

☐ ☐ ☐

Other (please specify)

40. Who was the primary caregiver?

41. To review, please indicate the status of your parents

42. Questions 4248

are about end-of-life arrangements and finances.

Do your living parents or did your deceased parents have a living will?

43. Who has power of attorney / who is the health care proxy?

44. Does/did your parent(s) have long-term health insurance?

★

You

☐ ☐ ☐

Other family member

☐ ☐ ☐

Nonfamily

member

☐ ☐ ☐

Other (please specify)

Both parents are living

☐ ☐ ☐

Both parents have died

☐ ☐ ☐

Mother is living, father has died

☐ ☐ ☐

Father is living, mother has died

☐ ☐ ☐

Yes

☐ ☐ ☐

No

☐ ☐ ☐

Additional Comments

▲

▼

You

☐ ☐ ☐
Other family member

☐ ☐ ☐
Nonfamily member

☐ ☐ ☐
Other (please specify)
Yes

☐ ☐ ☐
No

45. Who is responsible for managing your living parent(s) financial affairs?

46. Who is the executor for your parent(s) financial affairs after their death?

47. Do you have a living will?

48. Do you have long-term health insurance?

49. Questions 42-51 are about religion and faith. (And then there are just two more questions.)

Do you consider yourself a "person of faith?"

50. What was your religious affiliation in your family of origin? (If Jewish, please specify denomination)

Living parent(s)

☐ ☐ ☐
You

☐ ☐ ☐
Other family member

☐ ☐ ☐
Nonfamily member

☐ ☐ ☐
Other (please specify)
You

☐ ☐ ☐
Other family member

☐ ☐ ☐
Nonfamily member

☐ ☐ ☐
Other (please specify)
Yes

☐ ☐ ☐
No

☐ ☐ ☐
Yes

☐ ☐ ☐
No

☐ ☐ ☐
Yes

☐ ☐ ☐
No

☐ ☐ ☐
Additional Comments

▲

▼

51. What is your current religious affiliation? (If Jewish, please specify denomination)

52. How often do you think about your own end-of-life issues and/or decisions?

53. Do you find religion a source of comfort?

54. Do you find comfort in communal prayer?

55. How often do you attend services?

Often
Occasionally
Seldom
Never
Additional Comments

Yes
No
Additional Comments

Yes
No
Additional Comments

Never
Once a year / High Holy Days
A few times a year
Monthly
Biweekly
Weekly
Daily

56. Do you find comfort in personal prayer?

57. How often do you pray?

58. From whom do you seek comfort?

59. THANK YOU for taking time to complete this survey!

If you are able to participate in a six week group during the summer months, please indicate ALL the days and times that could work for you.

60. Please add any additional thoughts or comments.

Morning Afternoon Evening
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Yes
No
Additional Comments
Daily
Weekly
Occasionally

Seldom ☐ ☐ ☐

Never ☐ ☐ ☐

Clergy ☐ ☐ ☐

Family ☐ ☐ ☐

Friends ☐ ☐ ☐

Other (please specify) _____

Appendix C: Focus Group Participants

Participant	Gender	YOB	Age	Ordinal	Education	Occupation	Mother			Father		
								age	age of participant at time of parent death		age	age of participant at time of parent death
RF	Female	1949	65	Oldest/5	Some College	Sales	Deceased	77	52	Living	88	
FG	Male	1947	67	Youngest/3	Bachelor	Sales	Deceased	96	63	Deceased	89	35
AK	Male	1947	66	Youngest/3	Graduate	Law	Deceased	76	37	Deceased	90	51
SK	Female	1949	64	Oldest/2	Graduate	Education	Deceased	84	58	Deceased	94	64
JM	Female	1954	59	Oldest/2	Bachelor	Arts Design Media	Deceased	85	56	Living	92	
RM	Male	1953	60	Only	Graduate	Management	Deceased	90	57	Deceased	88	43
KM	Female	1961	52	Middle/5	Graduate	Sales / Realtor	Deceased	34	8	Living	78	
DN	Male	1953	60	Youngest/2	Graduate	Social Worker	Deceased	75	47	Deceased	83	50
SN	Female	1958	56	Youngest/4	Graduate	Sales	Living	84		Living	90	

Appendix D: Focus Group Attendance of Participants

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDANCE							
Name	#	6/09	6/23	6/30	7/14	7/28	8/04
RF	1	✓	x	X	x	x	X
FG	4	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
AK	3	x	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
SK	3	x	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
JM	2	✓	✓	X	x	x	X
RM	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
KM	5	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
DN	4	X	X	✓	✓	x	✓
SN	5	✓	✓	X	✓	x	✓

Appendix E: Focus Group 1 June 9, 2014
RF, JM, RM, KM, SN

VLA1 I can't thank you all enough for responding to the survey in the first place and then agreeing to be part of this group. I think I was very complete in my explanation which is what prompted you, I hope, to respond – that I'm working on my Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling and I've complete two years of graduate level classwork and now I have this project to do. I've completed my proposal and the topic as you know is Boomers born between 1946 and 1964 confronting their own mortality, comparing those whose parents are living and those whose parents have already died. I'm curious to see what will emerge. I have a hypothesis which I am not going to share with you yet. At some point I will. You may prove me completely wrong or you may prove me completely right. Some of you may fall right into my hypothesis and some of you may not. I don't know, but it has to do with how we approach life based on the fact that indeed we're all going to die.

Tonight what I'd like to do is invite you to just simply tell your story. And the rules that I would set up are to be as complete as you need to be, but brief as you can be so that everybody has an opportunity to speak. The subsequent sessions will probably be more interactive and this can become interactive if you have questions for each other as they're talking – by all means jump in and just be comfortable. So however you want to begin to tell what moved you about this, to come and further explore it or your story. One last point is while the idea of your parents I think is important as it impacts how you approach life and death, my topic is really about you, not about your parents.

SN1 Although where we are probably has a lot to do with our grandparents and parents. So should we include that?

VLA2 You should include whatever you want.

SN2 OK I'll go. So we want to talk about our feeling about death. So when I was young, I had a couple of experiences where a friend's mother died. A boy who was a year older died from brain cancer.

VLA3 What age?

SN3 He got cancer when I was about 9 and he died when I was probably like 11 or something. And then also a very good friend of my family lost her two best friends in an accident. So these were things that happened when I was young, and

they terrified me. I was really terrified and I remember being young and especially this boy died of brain cancer, and I'd be afraid of going to sleep, that if I saw a flash in the dark or something, I'd think that I was gonna get brain cancer. So it was a scary thing for me.

And then I don't remember really in middle years much happening and then my grandparents, as they passed away, they were all old. They were all in their 80s and 90s so that was easier to deal with because it seemed like they're supposed to die at some point and I mean each one was painful and hard and sad, but it wasn't terrifying, ya know? So and let's see – One grandparent died quickly from a heart attack and 3 died over a period of time – not terribly long, but one got a diagnosis and within a period of 3-4 months, died. So I had a chance to sort of say goodbye. So it was sad, but it was ok.

And then over the last couple of years, I've had a couple of friends die and I was telling you yesterday that the first one that died like 2 years ago, I felt that terrified feeling, ya know – very scary, hard to think about it, hard to talk about it. Just was upsetting, very upsetting. Then I read a couple of books about death and one of them – I can't remember the name of it [*Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*], but Eben Alexander is the author – a neurosurgeon who went into a coma and talked about his near death experiences. And it changed how I felt. It felt less scary. So last year when my friend Nancy died who had leukemia and had been up and down for a number of years, it was ... it's like I almost felt that when she finally died, it was like a blessing. And I felt like she was ok, and it didn't feel scary. It felt sad, but it also felt ok. So that was such a difference from a year before when my other friend died and it felt so awful.

So anyway, my parents are really open, organized, communicative about the stuff. Their folder is with everything and I admire that they are doing it. Like when I was answering the questions, I was like oh do we have this? So I realized that they're really organized, but I didn't really know – I'm not so organized about it and I'm not on top of things. We're [indicating Karen] in a women's group together and a lot of the people in our group are dealing with their parents, the end of life of their parents. It's like everyone who gets to that spot seems to get overwhelmed with so much to know at one time so – that's why I was interested to do this and be here with the conversation.

VLA4 It sets in motion for dealing with our own decision making about a lot of those issues – some of the economic issues, the ethical, bioethical issues that if we live in a world of denial which many of us do ... We'll see what comes of this.

KM1 I was 8 years old when my mother died in a car accident that I was witnessing and I remember details. I was in the car. I remember my mother dying. My father had pulled everyone out of the car because he was afraid that it could explode. I was unconscious for that part. I just felt myself lying next to my mother and I remember screaming at her to let me know what to do with my 10-month-old sister who was not responding to anything. I hit her tushy, and I shook her – whatever I could do because I remember this was something I had to do to get somebody breathing again. I was 8 at that time. My vivid memory of her death... that I was afraid to touch my mother's hand which was lying right next to me. I was just terrified of it. And we found out, it was of course a shock, but I would always say I was 8 year old, and as a child you accept your life the way it is.

The death of my mother was not as horrible as the five years that followed when we were not a family because my father was in a very bad stage, badly injured and all that. And when he actually married my mother, my second mother, that's when our life completely changed. I do remember very clearly that I was probably a year older. My father had a friend who took care of us once in a while who had invited another friend and they were talking about another friend who had a lump in her stomach and died a few months later. That terrified me because now all of a sudden I understood – my experience was so sudden – this could happen to everyone. They just have something and then die and have no real chance to have a life. Or I didn't have a life – I had a life obviously. But I remember that so clearly that was the start of me being afraid of death. And I remember also when I turned 13, I thought to myself, I am the luckiest 13 year old because I don't have cancer, I'm not on my way to die.

I think that feeling is still in me. I am still scared of cancer. I am more scared of cancer than dying suddenly in a car accident. I think I'm afraid of the pain, how to let go, how to watch my family suffer along with me. And I'm not sure exactly where that whole part is coming from – maybe from the fact that I had a grandmother, who I dearly loved, I would say was probably the person who helped us to start a normal life after my mother had passed away. And she died of cancer, which my father would not tell us for a long time and then all of a sudden everybody talked about it and I just thought I was 10 at that time – how unfair for two reasons. First of all that she had to die I thought was awful; that she died of cancer, a disease that I started to be terrified of; and even though I didn't know

anybody else with that disease, to me it was such an absolute, something that just all my life I think I have been scared of that.

I don't think I'm that scared of dying, but just the way to get there. And my father is not in good health. He had bypass and I saw him in November. He came to New York and he told me he gives himself four more years. Which again to me – I realize when I told my husband – it means it's such a definite end. Ya know it's ... that to me is really scary. I can't deal with that.

VLA5 Is he in Germany?

KM2 He is in Germany.

VLA6 And is he ill? He's so definite. I give myself four more years.

KM3 Yes – four more years to live and then he'll die and he makes my mother pretty miserable. They don't have such a great relationship in the first place and it's gotten much worse. And I learned that when you are sick, you have to be nice to everyone else because they will take advantage of you in a negative way if they see, now they have the upper hand. Let me explain this. OK my mother has – and I know this isn't about this – has suffered really a lot with my father the way he treats her... never decided to leave him, he decided to leave her and then she was welcoming him back when he came back.

And now since he is sick, she takes vacations, she is not around for certain holidays... always used to be family holidays and her explanation? "Because I can." And she knows it really bothers him. Is it cruel? Yes, but it's not meant to be cruel; it's just meant to make a statement in her case. And I totally understand where she's coming from. And I don't blame her for this. But for me, if I don't feel well, for example, or if I'm stressed – lately that has been the case, I can be snippy to my husband who's like the biggest, strong supporter I have, my real anchor. And I feel bad about it and I keep thinking if I were sick, and I would behave like this, that would be awful because the rest of my life that I have, you would remember me afterward... that I was awful. And I have to say that I don't have very good memories of my mother and I'm very up front with that because we had a difficult childhood. And I remember my mother as hitting us a lot, not wanting to have anything to do with us. I have an identical twin sister so the two of us grew up together and always had each other. But ya know –

VLA7 And when you're saying your mother now – you're birth mother?

KM4 My birth mother, my birth mother. I don't have these sorts of memories, but I was always asking for stories that were positive. But I think part of why I don't have the good memories is because maybe I was really mad at her for leaving. For just... I mean that was just... I have to admit I was 24 years old when I did a therapy and that was the very first time where I actually said I get it! It's not my fault. I wasn't horrible to her. I don't have to feel really terrible that she died. I mean I was an adult just thinking about that. It's amazing.

[She notices a dead bird on the outside deck] By the way there's a dead bird on your deck.

VLA8 He came today and I didn't connect it to tonight!

KM5 So I liked your questionnaire for the simple reason that it made me so aware. I don't have a living will, I don't think my parents have, I don't think my mother-in-law who's 87 and really not doing that well physically. Mentally she's great, but physically she's not doing that well. And that's something I really should have in place, especially because I'm afraid of dying slowly. And I don't want my family to have to make a decision for me. I want to make this decision and I'm very clear on my decision. I do not want anything that prolongs my life.

VLA9 Thank you for being here and thank you for sharing.

RM1 Your comment about a childhood friend brought back memories of the first person that I realized had died was a classmate of mine when I was 7. And then probably for 14 years, nobody died... anywhere... ever. I mean all of my relatives were old and my parents would take me to them and they would visit and everybody was fine. My grandmother would live with us for the last 15 years of her life. She was a complete invalid so she was sitting in a chair or was picked up and used canes and would go to the bathroom and go back to bed and whatever. She passed away when I was a freshman in college of I guess what happens to them when they turn 96. They just kind of, ya know... things give out. Seemed perfectly normal. She was the only grandparent I ever knew.

My dad was 45 when I was born. My mom was 33. So everybody in the extended family was either a generation above or a generation below. So I had people to look up to more so than people my own age. The first inkling I had of death was this amazing paranoia of there's never gonna be a tomorrow... ever. I mean it's not like next month or next year or five years. Like when you're dead – that's it.

It's gone and nothing ... that's the only thing that I could think of is. Everything comes back around, but this. So I kind of put that out of my mind and said it won't happen to me. And then in terms of just the whole concept of death – ya know, if you ... from the way I've been raised and the people I've seen, my whole family – pathetically logical – sort of take care of things. And I didn't realize until my dad said when he was in the advanced stages of prostate cancer, don't bring the kids anymore. Ach – dad how can you say that. Ya know, they're 7 and 5 and he said 'cause I don't want them to have anything but this as being their last memory of me. Wheeling him to the playground and screwing around on the monkey bars or whatever.

And my mom said the same thing three years ago. The kids can come over next week and then after that ... and she was pretty much going downhill, but she still had all of her faculties. And I think that is the kind of transition that we've been blessed with, that whatever marbles we were born with, we seem to keep them 'til the end. And in that regard my dad was unbelievably organized in terms of a living will and all of the documentation that you would need. And I thought, well ok, that's the way he is. And when my mom was going through her illness, she would always say, you should really know where all the boxes are cause it's gonna be a big mess and I'm not gonna be able to pick them up and I'm not gonna be able to tell you where they are. And then it dawned on me that my parents didn't do that or people don't do that for themselves. They do that to spare their children the aggravation of going through all the crap that they kept for so many years.

And it really hit me when I found a video my cousin made of a converted 8 mm of my parent's wedding and thought, now that was smart because my dad realized that 30 years from now, 40 years from now – whenever – they won't have projectors for this anymore. So we'll get cousin Peter to convert that film onto VHS. And I now have to remember to do that because in another 10 years-time, there won't be any VHS players so I have to make a DVD. But that whole thing about sparing the next generation the aggravation during a time of deep sorrow... of having to sort of sort through things. And we still have boxes of crap, but it's much less than bushels of boxes of crap. But in terms of fear of dying – as long as I don't touch the third rail or decide, I wonder how high this roof really is, it's gonna happen. As long it happens where I can see it happening. Now I may change my mind in ten years-time so I'll be back in 10 years. I'm done.

SN4 What do you mean by “see it happening?”

RM2 My folks saw what was happening to them physically and still had the very strong mental awareness. The funniest story was my dad – the kids were 7 and 5 – we went to Cognewaugh to walk around, and one of them said he had to pee and my father said, oh thank goodness ‘cause I have to pee too. So, the three of them were out there, peeing in the woods. One of them had an excuse. The other two were just bored. So...

JM1 Well, let’s see. I grew up in a family that we didn’t have any religious affiliation or training whatsoever. I also grew up in a family where I didn’t have any aunts or uncles. There was only immediate family. My mother never had any brothers or sisters so I never had any aunts or uncles. And my father’s brother died of natural causes when he was a young boy. So we never had any extended family except for who is now my... I call her my aunt, my father’s best friend, who turned out to be my mother’s best friend from Germany. But like many people, both of my parents are holocaust survivors so death was always a... something that was sad. But for me, I always grew up thinking that when you die, that’s it – it’s finished. And I found that because I had no other schooling or thinking of it, I could wrap my head around the idea of a black hole easier than I could... even though I tried to believe in reincarnation and I tried to believe in all sorts of other things, to me they were just mental excuses to give yourself a little comfort when, in fact, ya know...

And everybody in my family decided they were gonna be cremated. So there’s never going to the grave. There’s never any of that, and as I said I never had any extended family. And oddly enough my formation of thinking of death came as a child watching my parents, my mom in particular, cry about [tearfully] holocaust movies and things like that... because so much was taken away...just gone. So to me, it was just gone. When I was a little girl, maybe 10 years old, I also had a friend who... he ended up committing suicide. He had polio. And it was somebody I had grown up with at Beaver Lake... Walter... and he just... One day I just heard that he had killed himself. I was very sad for him, not because he was dead, but how unhappy he should have been to take his own life. But in a way I was slightly relieved for him.

All my other relatives similarly were very old. My mother’s father was deaf. He came to this country and then he sort of died. We never went to funeral services. They just sort of went away... Ya know, I grew up...And the same with my father’s mother, my grandmother. I was in college... I was a freshman and I got a call that Omi had died. It was sad, but it was a different time and my father had put her into a nursing home and she had deteriorated and it was horrific and I was

relieved that she was gone, out of her suffering. It was of those times when nursing homes were horrific. I'm sure he was guilt ridden, but there were no options. She couldn't live with us... I don't know. I was also so young that I couldn't wrap my head around it, but she was just gone.

As an adult then my first experience with death was with a friend of mine who ended up dying of AIDS... not that he was gay, but it just turned out by happenstance that his wife had had a lover prior to marrying him who didn't share with her that he was bi-sexual or had encounters and he died, she died and then... he died. They just all died and he was the most heterosexual man I ever knew and I was devastated because I couldn't wrap my heart around the fact that somebody was just taken... it was so unfair. He was so young and so full of life and then he was gone for no reason of anything he did on his own. He wasn't sick. I mean he didn't have an illness. It was just ... that was that.

Finally, as an adult woman, when my mother died, we'd always been very honest with one another, and as I said, I mean, my view of the world, mostly probably informed through her, was that she sort of made me promise that [tearfully] I wouldn't let her suffer. So in a way, if we had been allowed to euthanize our parents, I would have done that. And I kind of feel like I almost did cause we gave her so much morphine so that she could just go already. But that was her wish to me without any doubt about it. She looked me in the eye and she said I do not want to suffer. And I said I will not let you suffer and I do believe in that if there's no option, then go peacefully. Just go. So she did.

And now my father has dementia. I seem to be a caretaker for people. I'm taking care of people, but that's fine with me because my belief in life is that we as people should make the people around us comfortable as they can be at the end stages of their lives so they don't suffer. And that's what I want to do for everybody because I don't believe in an afterlife, but I don't believe that one needs to suffer at the end. So just help it along, be there, give people comfort even if you just sit by their side so they're not alone, that they're not scared. So that's what I believe.

As an adult woman... it's not because I'm turning 60 and I realize that I have less time ahead than I have behind in theory, which I'm still trying to wrap my head around. I think that's a peculiar place to be. I'm not quite at ease. I haven't quite come to my realization of how I'm gonna deal with all this. But it is hitting me that along with having to deal with a bunch of people that are still needing a lot of help, that I have relatively short period of time and I have said oftentimes to my

children, our children that... pay attention 'cause you're gonna have to take care of me. And I don't think that that's wrong. It's not an unusual burden because they see that I take care of my parents with a happy heart, unburdened. And I want them to do that too. And I think they're of the mindset, Todd in particular, that he can do that. Scott's a little more like my sister which is a little more delicate. But I think that that's something that adults and parents should teach, that it's not horrific as far as I'm concerned, it's not horrific, it doesn't have to be devastating, but it has to be done with dignity. And so I've tried to show in my best ways possible, but then remind them, don't take it for granted, just pay attention. Because that's what we owe the people we love is to allow people to go with as much comfort and dignity as possible.

VLA10I want to get to Ruth, but I'm curious what brought the tears.

JM2 Oh, I'm thinking about my mom. I... I... She's the only person that I saw that really suffered. Both Fred and Rita went pretty fast. She took a little bit longer, but I also feel a little guilty 'cause I should have helped her sooner. I feel that... I feel like I let her down a little bit. I let her go a little bit longer than... she was in pain at the end and...

VLA11Do you think society pushes us in the other direction and there was probably a little bit of push and pull.

JM3 Well, there's only so much one can do. I mean what happened with Kevorkian. I mean often we saw... My mother and I would talk about it. We talked about it long before she ever got sick and I do believe in that. I believe that you should be able to assist people if there's no... ya know, when you're 88 years old or 86 years old or 80 years old, and you're not going to get better, and you're not gonna be going out dancing. I'm sure it's a larger life issue if somebody were in a coma, when do you pull the plug? Ya know, all of those things that are big life issues. But in life issues where somebody is definitely, gradually going and there's not going to be a coming back point. And allow people to go without having them suffer... for what end. For another week? To lie in a bed and wheeze? That's not life. That's not the life that you wanna live. So much so that that's that. That's what I think.

RF1 So this is such a deep topic, clearly. Where do you start? And I gather from your introduction you're interested in how we approach our mortality, and you don't approach your own mortality without bringing with you the experience of your family mortality, and how they handled it, and all that because that's who you are

and that forms your opinion. So to be fair I face a lot of things my family never faced. And I don't ... I'm completely, not completely... I'm somewhat emotionally disconnected from the moment of my death. I don't ever think about that, ever. I'm universally preoccupied with the fact that I'm 65 and if not now, when? Hence the convertible in the driveway and that I've only got X amount of years and something can hit me anytime and that's it. And because I have officiated at my mother's illness and subsequent deaths, my Aunt Paula with whom the Rabbi was very kind to officiate for me. And my Aunt was a holocaust survivor and had no children.

VLA12I still have the story you shared with me.

RF2 Cool story. And so I'm the one who says for months and months and months or years or years or years, see a lawyer, get the paperwork. I'm the bitch. I am. I'm the one who stood in the kitchen while my mother was dying. And although you think that certain things are universal, I agree with you 187%, those things are not universal. And my experience is that everybody brings their own set to their death experience, and when it comes right down to it, people are not mourning the one who died; they're mourning their own loss on whatever level they feel it. And it becomes very much about the person who is living. And sometimes they don't set their feelings aside long enough to consider the person who has died, which I think distorts the entire process, but that's my experience. And I say this having been there at many people's demise. And being the executor or "the one."

And I'm now in the process again of going... my mother and my father were divorced and not living together and she was remarried, but separated at the time of her death. So I had the step-father and 3 half siblings to deal with. And there was a lot of screaming and she's in the bedroom dying – just by the way – of cancer and we had had discussions. There was an animal outside her neck and she couldn't talk, but she made it very clear, she didn't want to be in pain... all of those things. And one sister who was by this time in her 50s is saying, just feed her; she'll be fine. We just have to get her something to eat. My other sister disapproved... is there saying, send her back to the hospital. Never mind that she actually told me she didn't want to go. And so on. And there is a kitchen full of people screaming at me and someone saying, don't wave that piece of paper at me. You're so business-like. Why is it always about business? And I'm like, no, this is about her speaking. She can't... Well, anyway so they were all screaming at me and she took care of everything – she died in the bedroom while they were screaming at me.

VLA13 Which is what she wanted

RF3 Which is what she wanted. With hospice on board, and to this day, my sister will tell you that hospice killed people, that they are the worst. So if you think all of that is universal, although it should be, it isn't.

[nods and expressions of agreement all around]

RF4 And my x-husband, who is now also diseased, had an expression, where there is a will, there are relatives. So anyway, I probably face my mortality with more of a concern about what will lead up to it. I mean, if I'm gonna be sick, there's probably not a lot I can do about that, but I'm gonna do everything I can about it until I can't do anything else about it. And I don't want to burden my children with... I mean they're gonna be burdened 'cause I'm a packrat and ya know, I'm trying, but I just am. They're just gonna have to deal with that, and there's a lot of stuff they shouldn't have to deal with so I'd like to think that I have the financial stuff and all of that organized for... because I've been around and seen what the alternative is and it's not pretty. But I have to admit I face all that extremely detached.

I'm not there yet, so it's a business proposal... It's one of those things you do. You get life insurance, you get car insurance, you get a will, you get a... ya know. I'm detached emotionally from any of that, so when I, for the last year, nagged my parents who were brought up in a state of denial, with an address in New York, but in the state of denial, like their parents who came from Europe and had nothing to discuss. What they did have was their equivalent, which was a burial society. They paid like a dollar three eighty every month so that at the end of term somebody would bury them and it's the same thing, but they don't equate it that way. There was no money to discuss and when people died they would get together and argue over crap. Why? Because nobody wrote down, you should get this piece of crap and you should get this piece of crap, right? But they don't face it, they don't go to doctors because the doctor doesn't tell you you have something wrong with you. Then presumably you don't, you know. And so all of that makes me crazy and I'm the one who says, we have to do this. We have to do this. We have to do this.

And I treat it... I treat all of that other stuff that way, myself included. But not when it comes to what am I gonna do till then? I'm gonna go to the doctor, I'm gonna fix it if it breaks. I'm gonna do all of that stuff 'cause I don't want to get there any sooner than I have to. And so it's your question, I think basically, how

do I approach it now at this stage of my life? That's how I approach it. I know it's inevitable, but it ain't over 'til it's over. And I've seen enough people go through... My first experience with death was when I was... family death. .. I had an aunt who died. My father's sister died. We had a relationship. I wasn't attached to her, but I came home from... Well I was working at summer camp and I came home for the funeral, and I said, Dad what did she die of? And he said to me, "stupidity," which is interesting because in large part he's doing the same thing now. But basically, she was overweight, she was diabetic, she didn't take care of herself. She'd go to the doctor, but she didn't do what the doctor said so she had a renal failure and she was obese and basically she didn't have to die.

And on some level, my mother did the same thing. She died way too young because, if she'd done what the doctor said early enough, she wouldn't have. But I never lost anybody so close to me that wasn't so ready to go or that I wasn't ready to part with, that I'd been wrenched. So I mean I was so close to my aunt. But she was so gone for so long that I had lost her... the essence of the... the body was ya know. We kept her, we actually kept her. I mean, somebody at ... my aunt was at Atria. And rabbi used to come to Atria to do services so that's how I got to know her. And one of the residents, because they had no filter after a while, said to me, she always looks so well dressed and so well groomed, but ya know, it looked like she was propped up after a while. I mean and we did, we kept her going because I had lovely help, and we were very blessed on that level. But inside Paula was gone a long time ago, and I had separated. I mean my connection to Paula was gone. It's like how's the children? Fine. How are you Paula? Fine. What are you watching on television? And that was it. And then there were no conversations. There was no more essence of Paula. So when she died, I lost her a long time ago. And I felt sad, but not wrenched. Ya know?

And my mother as well... My mother was gone for a long time before she died. So I'm a little disconnected from the emotional pain that other people have felt. By the time I come in, it's like calling the attorney. And I'm not an attorney, but that's what it's like, ya know? I'm the executor. By the time I come in, I've either cared for you all the way along, but by the time I kick in, it's sort of over. And I have to admit, I'm approaching my own death the same way. But it's my life that I'm concerned about now. And so, but ya know. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

VLA14So now... reactions, comments ...

- RM3 I love what you said, all of it. I'm gonna take better care of myself starting tomorrow.
- RF5 Oh, I hear a "but" coming on.
- RM4 But it reminded me of my freshman year in college. John, my college roommate's dad passed away of a heart attack our freshman year, and it was after my grandmother passed away. We were in upstate NY so I and one other of his friends drove over to the house that was an hour from school. And I was absolutely shocked and dismayed. I go into the house and Mrs. Rampy's there. There's no lock on the door, there's no front door; it's just a screen door. Animals are running in and out and relatives are coming over with... they're lugging quarter kegs of beer and lasagna and I'm thinking, are you kidding me? And John sees the horror in my face and he says, Ray, come here. And he introduces me to his Uncle Bob. And Bob says, yeah the family is really big and we're really spread out and the only time we get together is for funerals and weddings. And ya know what? We just drink ourselves silly and party. Because that's... I mean it's not so much the drinking silly, but it's the partying. It's the take advantage of life while you're here. And if the death of somebody is the unfortunate reason why you all get together, mourn for ten minutes at the service, and then party because you haven't seen people for a long time.
- RF6 Have you ever been to an Irish wake?
- RM5 I'm afraid to.
- RF7 One thing that I have learned, 'cause my first experience was with my aunt when my grandmother was still alive. And this was a real traditional wailing, holding my grandmother back. She wanted to throw herself into the coffin with my aunt. Mein Shirley, mein Shirley. And literally, the uncles are dragging her back off the thing. So this is how I thought all funerals were. Then you go to an Irish wake and they are celebrating the life of somebody. We mourn the death. We cover the mirrors, we beat ourselves, right? You wear black, you rip things to shreds. God forbid somebody should tell a joke in the room 'cause you can't even let a little happiness slip in, as if it's disrespectful to the dead person. And that's our way, but it's not everybody's way. And the Irish celebrate life. They go and they have a party and they celebrate the person's life... and so the completely different perspective. And it isn't that they don't... but I will tell you, hundreds of people will show up to do it and the rooms are packed and that's all out of respect for the dead person and for the family and to give comfort. And all of that does give

comfort so it isn't that they don't mourn. They just mourn very differently. And I'm not so sure that they don't have a leg up.

KM6 I would love to know that people celebrate my death, celebrate after.

RF8 They're not celebrating the dead. They're celebrating what was their life.

KM7 I didn't mean that.

RF9 Although I also knew somebody who... they were singing "ding dong the witch is dead" and I thought that was just... beyond belief.

KM8 You want to know something. My mother-in-law had this boyfriend... nobody could stand. She could have done so much better. But when he died, first of all we were celebrating... just so relieved because he came attached with two daughters that were just awful... awful, awful. We went to the funeral. We're sitting there for two minutes and my husband gets up and says we must be at the wrong funeral. This can't possibly be Fred's funeral. And he said it loud enough so people could actually hear it. They were telling things about Fred that could have... It just was not Fred, ya know... It was a saint they were talking about.

RF10 It was Fred to other people

KM9 No. His doctor actually came up and said because they had asked him to talk. And he said well, I really don't have much good to say because he was just the most difficult patient I had. The second I would see him in the room he would curse me out. I would just walk there, would look at his chart, would make comments. But then he said amazingly, he gave NYU a million dollars. So what can I tell you? I got to be nice about this.

VLA15It's amazing that he was so honest.

RF11 My husband went to him when he had his issues.

SN5 He's honest.

KM10 He's honest, but it was just amazing to feel you were at a funeral that has nothing to do with the actual person.

RF12 Ya know I'll tell you, I went to one of those actually. It was my husband's. And I was really thrilled for my kids. My husband was an alcoholic and when I... My kids were in college when their dad had to leave, and I did not know how I was gonna tell them and then one of them said what took you so long? And so they didn't have a great adolescence. It's not easy growing up with an alcoholic father and all the crap that goes along with it. But, ya know, we did. And 'til we couldn't anymore. And he wound up living in Florida in his dream house and there was a lot of resentment. The kids were not... He was lucky he even had his kids anymore, talking to him. But he did, and then he got sick and he had made a lot friends in Florida. He was living his dream. He lived on a golf course and all he did all day was play golf. And ya know what they do, they get up and they drink and they play golf. Everybody did that. And he didn't have any more stress or any pressure so everybody thought he was a pretty good guy, except for the neighbors 'cause they really did not like it when he drove up on the lawn, but nobody's perfect. And so he had some friends and some not.

Anyway he got sick, and at the end there was nobody left 'cause he had gone through two more relationships, thank you. And by the end there was just nobody left and these are my kids and so I went down to help. He died the last week and then I stayed to close up his house, believe it or not. And his friends showed up at the hospice house where he was and they said the friends would like to do something. And it just never occurred to me because I was a stranger there. And it just didn't even occur to me and I went, oh that's nice. And at this point he wasn't there and we were staying in his house. So I went OK, but let me talk to the kids. And the kids said yeah. And I thought about it and I thought this would be good for my kids. Well! The amount of people who showed up on a dime was unbelievable. Mind you, when he left here, people were not even having dinner with him because their spouses wouldn't have anything to do with him. So he was devoid of friends pretty much up here, and had alienated a lot of people. And so this was the sort of memory my kids had.

Well, all of these other people showed up and somebody said if we'd only had more notice, we would have had twice as many people. It turned out he was very well-liked, I mean, because underneath he was the guy that I married years ago, the relaxed guy, the guy... except for the ya know. And one particularly heart-warming story, I thought, was this guy who walked in, disabled with a cane and kind of sideways, and said that his house was on the whatever 4th or 5th hole, and he would sit out there and watch the golfers. And I guess one day my husband walked over and saw him every single day, and said, what's the deal? And he said, I would love to play golf, but ya know. And my husband apparently said to

him, don't let it bother you. Get up and do what you can, and whatever; it is will be fine. And he said, and because of him, I now play golf. And I'm amazed at how many people are ok with the way I am. And I'm having a good time and I want you to know that it was because of Bob. And I'm so thrilled for my kids that they heard this, and that they saw all these people come out for him. And so ... same guy – two completely different... Up north we couldn't even have had anything. I mean people would have come for us, but it wouldn't have been this big. And so it was the same guy – two different funerals.

SN6 I've been to a number of funerals and memorial services, my parents' friends and all Jewish, but none of them conservative or orthodox. They're all reform, it's all ya know. And I have to say they have moved me in the same way I feel moved at a Bar Mitzvah because they are about... they've been about celebrating the person's life. And I feel like every one of these that I've gone to... some of them, even the last one... Melanie's mom who I don't think I ever even met, but she belongs to the temple and I like her a lot. So I went to the service just to be there for her. And it was the most enjoyable, exciting, interesting thing. Her mother was a pip. The stories, the story tellers were amazing and it was just incredible. And I have felt this with some of my parent's friends, people I have known for many, many years, but I learned so much about them at these services because people did get up and share stories. And it was amazing and I still think about some of these things. I felt inspired by things I learned that they had done that I didn't know, but it inspired me in life. And so I am thankful I haven't had that experience with the... ya know, where you're not allowed to tell a joke. It's like actually my memory, my experience has been that people have laughed and loved.

RF13 Yeah, but that's a reform experience. The old guard was a lot more... ya know, my family sat on wooden boxes.

VLA But there's still... There's a wonderful sense of ingathering even in the most traditional approach to mourning.

RF14 It's just a very different...

VLA16 You said something very interesting which I want to pursue a little bit, which was the mourning is for those who are here, not for the ones who died. Does that resonate for anyone else in any way?

SN7 Yeah I was thinking...

VLA17 Did that jump out at you? What did that bring up for you?

SN8 So I was thinking in the few seconds there, I was like really thinking there. I was like, Oh so maybe that's true because especially if someone's sick and dying, we should want them to be able to move away from that sickness, and that pain and the desire to hold on may not be what's in their best interest, but it's what's in our best interest, that we don't want to lose that person. So I was trying to shift my thinking to get that and that's where my thinking went. I think when it's something that happens unexpectedly, it's such a different experience because everyone's... everybody's in such shock when it happens fast, and there's not that time to come to grips with it the way if it's a longer term thing. So I'm not sure about that.

RM6 You've brought up another memory that I have subconsciously put aside. A childhood friend, actually the son of my parents' best friend passed away when he was 36, and they were very religious. And that was the most... other than linear optimization class... that funeral was probably the most uncomfortable situation I've ever been in in my life. Because Michael's wife is up there sitting on a chair on a stage, crying, alone, uncontrollably. And it almost seemed like it was expected for her to do that. And,,,

RF15 Was this an orthodox?

RM7 Yeah, and you couldn't go up and console her because that was inappropriate.

RF16 Oh God...

RM8 So my mom went in and said let's go up to Margo and pay our respects.

VLA18 She was up on the bima?

RM9 Yah.

VLA That's very unusual.

RM10 This is really weird, and it's like, ok we were there for his mom and dad.

RF17 Was he a rabbi or anything?

RM11 No he was... I mean was a very, very religious kid, but he... I grew up... he could throw a ball four stories up in the air and catch it without moving. He was just very athle... and the dad was the president of the congregation who gave me shit constantly when I told him I was president of our congregation. I remembered you.... But that was an experience where that to me was mourning, and I realized that was mourning because it was someone who was so young even though it was a long-term disease. It was just a shame is not the right word, but it is ... That's just not right. And all of the other funerals I've been to are people who, other than Albert who was 70... everybody is in their 80s and 90s and it's not mourning in the sorrowful way, but more in a, no I'm not mourning a person; I'm actually learning about the person, and how they did things for their children or their friends, and retelling stories and you think, I should really do that, that's a really nice thing. I'm becoming a better person by copying what that person supposedly did in his or her life as opposed to the... what I consider that other type of mourning which is what a tragedy this was.

JM4 Well, it's reaffirming life and also I think it's very helpful and healing because often times it's hard at the end when a person goes, your last memories are really of the... what's embedded in your brain of a pinched difficult face as opposed to the happiness with which they lived their life and embedded their soul upon you or their imprint upon you. So I mean, often times I've gone to people's memorial services that I didn't even work with, that I didn't even know, or parents of people, but you hear wonderful stories about their lives and you think, Oh... the same thing... oh, I wish I'd gotten to know that person, or oh, I know now why he behaves the way he does because he learned from his family. And it's just... there's a joyfulness and it does make you realize that if anything in life, we're obligated... I feel like we're obligated, we're here to make the world a better place. And you should always do, I always try to do my little mitzvahs regardless, whether it's holding an elevator door open for somebody one day, or whatever it is, everyday try to do a little something, but to leave my lega.... I would like my legacy to be the little things every day, not the big things, but that's what you do.

RM12 Yah sure.

JM5 Well not to you [looking at RM who is her husband]

RF18 But isn't that the whole thing, it's a legacy. If it's a legacy and you leave it to other people then you need to know about it so they should be talking about it .

- JM6 I don't even know if they need to know about it. I mean you can leave a lega... Sometimes it's like the people that give gifts anonymously.
- RF19 But somebody should pop up and say, ya know what, it was this one time I was having a really bad day and she came and she said... and just turned my day. And if that person popped up, someone who didn't know that about you because you're so private and do it so privately will turn around and say he couldn't have been all bad, he donated a million bucks. It's a different thing. But I have to tell you one thing I didn't consider which is something I wanted to do. My friend and I were talking about getting rid of some of the stuff in the house. We all discuss that. The kids don't want it. What are we gonna do with it? So I'm trying really hard to lighten the load, but I know I'm never gonna get rid of it because it would be like shedding my life and I don't want to live in an empty house. But I am considering writing little notes so that as they're cleaning out the house cursing me like why did she need this shit and can you believe she kept this and Oh my God ya know... I'm considering planting little notes and them popping out when they least expect me. Just to keep them company while they're ya know...
- JM7 What a nice idea!
- RF20 I was thinking that might be... and then will I know about it? Or will I not know about it? Will I be having a good time?
- KM11 Just going back to what we were talking about... the people who are most affected who are staying behind, not actually the person who died. We always had two ferrets. I have to just tell that because I just thought of it. Ferrets are little animals. They are related to weasels. They are not rats or anything like that, they are not rodents. Anyway they are very tame.
- JM8 Wasn't the mayor of New York trying to get rid of ferrets?
- KM12 No, he was trying to get them back into the city which is the only positive thing about him. Anyway, so we always had two and I always would explain why we had two ferrets because they're very active and they play with each other and even though they get very tame when you play with them and they know you and all that, it's better to have two and raise them. It's like siblings, ya know. I always made a fuss about my kids having siblings. One day I had to put one of the ferrets to sleep and I picked up Seryna, she was six years old at that time, from school. And in the car I told her that Ferrad... I took him to the vet and the vet said that he had to die because he was suffering. And she gave him an injection and he just

went to sleep and didn't wake up and was very happy that way. All of a sudden Seryna was falling totally apart in the car. And I stopped the car on the side. I go in the back and I hold her and she goes, mommy you know how terrible this is for Snapple? Which is the other ferret. And wait a minute, you're six years old and actually you may be very right. It's probably worse for Snapple being on his own. So the next week we would watch Snapple run into all these corners and the little hiding places that the ferrets had together looking for his brother. And I realized that Seryna was so aware of the fact that, at six year old, it was much harder for the animal who stayed behind than actually for the animal who died.

RF21 You must be so proud of her!

RM13 Wow!

RF22 How empathetic is she!

KM13 And I had the sensation that she's very right.

RF23 She's very empathetic.

KM14 That's what it is! But it was so hard to watch. She was very right... this poor ferret. We ended up getting two more ferrets, together, as siblings.

VLA I think that is such a beautiful way to end tonight. Really wonderful.

Appendix F: Focus Group 2 June 24, 2014

FG, AK, SK, JM, RM, KM, SN

VLA1 So last time for those who were here, I asked them to tell their story. What I'd like to do this time is read a poem. And simply have you respond to it in any way you want. There's no right or wrong. This is your time. And I'd like to repeat what I said last time as kind of a rule which is that if somebody else is speaking, let them finish. I read somewhere and I know I do it too, when somebody else is speaking, we're planning our next thought instead of really listening. And this is a time to really practice that listening. It will give each of you the opportunity, when you're speaking, to be listened to as well. But I ask the speaker to be expansive and rich and full with your thoughts, but to be as succinct and clear as you can so that everybody has an opportunity. So it's both sides of the same idea that when you're speaking, know that nobody is going to interrupt you, but try to find the essence of what you want to say in as rich a way as possible, but in as few words

as possible. And when you're not speaking, really practice that art of listening. It's such a hard art and I'm the biggest offender. So here's the poem –

It is a fearful thing
to love what death can touch.

A fearful thing
to love, hope, dream,
to be –

to be,
and
to lose.

A thing for fools, this
and
a holy thing,
a holy thing
to love.

For your life has lived in me,
your laugh once lifted me,
your word was a gift to me.

To remember this brings painful joy.

'Tis a human thing, love, a holy thing,
to love what death can touch.

Chaim Stern

JM1 Would you read it one more time please?

VLA2 Read the poem again

SK1 I wrote to a friend today that the price of love is the price of loss. And you can't love without the pain of that loss. But the price of that love is something I never could have lived without. What would my life have been if I hadn't had the experience of that love? It would have been empty. So by losing my dad only a few months ago, I have to keep putting back the happinesses in my heart that were taken away from me by its loss. And remembering the funnier things and the poignant thing is the things that helped me put that love back into my heart that was sucked out when he died. And this weekend we're going down to Florida to deal with the apartment. And every time I touch a shirt or... it's almost like I'm

hoping that his scent is still there so that I can haul it in and put it back in 'cause he's not gonna be back. So again, I don't know if I didn't have that love, I couldn't have had this pain.

SN1 I'm thinking about the poem. What came to my mind when I started hearing it were the losses... it's interesting, it's actually other people's losses. And I was thinking particularly about people who lost their children. Somehow I can make a lot more sense out of an older person dying who lived a good life and feel sort of a completeness even though a sadness at the loss, I feel a completeness around it, whereas, it feels so incomplete and devastating and tragic. So as you were reading it, I was just remembering those friends – a funeral for a one-year old and the casket was like this [holds hands up to show the tiny size of the casket]. And I remember thinking about friends who had miscarriages and just that tragic pain. So that's what I was feeling until the sentence about your last laugh helped hold me up and then it didn't fit anymore. But up till that moment, that's what was coming to me and I know too many people who have lost their kids ranging from pre-natal to college-age or even twenty-five and under – like way too many people.

So that's what terrifies me the most about death touching people who shouldn't be there yet. That seems just horrifying. I see my dad who's 90 and he is definitely aging a lot, just over the last 6 months even. And it's like all of a sudden... you know I never really thought about it with him, but all of a sudden, it's like I know that it's not imminent, I don't think, but it's coming closer. And it's like the pace has picked up speed I think. So that is... I think that what's going on in my mind around him is that I need to have really good moments with him, I need to take pictures to capture this... I need to take videos. So that's what's in my mind... that I just want to be able to capture it so I can have that scent or that sound or that visual and be able to watch the video or look at a picture of us hugging, and I think that will be somewhat of a comfort if I have those things.

[KM arrived and we did introductions. Then I read the poem again.]

JM2 I have a little trouble relating to the poem because I don't feel the fear about loving something knowing that it's going to be taken away, I don't. I think that I view death as completely inevitable so I'm totally acceptant of it. I may not like it, but I'm totally acceptant of it. But it doesn't make me fear to give, exist, participate in the present or in relationships or any of that, although that one line about... there was something about the juxtaposition of the happiness and the sadness

VLA3 Painful joy

JM3 Painful joy is spectacular I think. I mean that totally wraps it up. But to me painful joy is still an acceptance. And in some ways the poem made feel a little bit as though the poet was rejecting that notion, that it was almost scary to love because at some point it was going to be taken away and I can't live my life that way. So that was one thing about the poem. I think that if you accept the things that are going to happen, for me at least, it's a... I guess I don't think about it on a daily basis. However, whenever I have to deal with death in some manner, I just think you have to be respectful of it and make it as easy as possible. But it's an odd thing because, on the other hand, for as much as I say... but then again my memory is pretty shot anyway. But even my mother... this is the week of my mother's yartzeit, and I know people go about reading their name at various moments and things, I guess I don't have to do that. Maybe it's because I was still so busy dealing with other people, but I don't know. When it comes to the whole thing, I just feel that you... if you live your life to the fullest and then make the transition to the end, it's easy as possible, but one doesn't negate the other.

VLA4 You're welcome to speak from your own heart or respond to something somebody said or a combination of both, whatever comes up for you.

KM1 I... It never occurred to me to be... that I should be fearful to love something because it will end at some point. I never thought about that. Never. It makes me think and it's kind of awkward to think that, because you have to accept the loss, you might want to rethink whether you want to love it. It's not really the ideal, but this is how I feel about it. I can't very much relate to it either because I feel that I don't think that way.

RM1 I agree with you. I think the poet wrote it either deliberately vague or I haven't figured out the golden thread that goes through it all because it doesn't seem to be consistent. The only thing that I can see where you'd be afraid to love something for fear of it not being there is a younger person who's just broken up with someone and is a little gun-shy about starting another relationship. But I don't think that's the intent of the poem. I think it's more of the larger things in life and the more permanent things. And I think what Susan said was spot on. That to a degree I feel if things take their natural progression in the order of the circle of life, and as long as it's not at a premature age, it's sort of righter and more appropriate than if there's a break in the generations. A parent has to bury a child. And I could almost see the line about your laughter has brought me the joy of

your laughter – something like that – is a parent of a relatively young child. And that's the other part that I can't figure out what this really means.

- JM4 On the other hand, what you said about wanting to smell your father's shirt or whatever, I remember very vividly when my mom passed away the unbearable loss and the... there was no way to fill the void psychologically or in any way. And I know this isn't a poem in any way, but even with the poem, it's strange it's almost, at least for me, it's almost like childbirth in that the time that terrible, terrible hurt dissipates and it's filled with something else that's far more manageable. So I just...
- AK1 I've always feared loss – it is a fearful thing. But to me, it helps me improve the quality of the way I love. And I'll go to that place and say I love you.
- SK2 The day before my father died, he knew this was it. And I said to him let me get on the next plane. And he said, it's not necessary to be here. I just want to hear your voice. And I want you to hear what I have to say – I love you. That was the last thing I heard. But I'm grateful for that because those words keep reverberating – I love you. Next morning he died. When my mother died in '07, I was devastated. I mean I sat and I watched her die. And I think my father purposely didn't want me on that plane. He wanted to die on his own terms 'cause he saw what I was like when my mother died. And all he said was, I just want to hear your voice. But when he died, I thought to myself, how can you be a 64-year-old orphan? I have a husband, a husband who loves you. And I remember somebody saying to me at the funeral that the love is always gonna be different. We worry about each other as husband and wife, but the worry that the parent has for the child is very different. So in some ways that last person who would say, where have you been? I haven't heard from you in three days – that worry was moved off the table. Even though we will worry about each other, it's a different worry.
- AK2 I think the love of a parent... you're talking about someone that historically was there to take care of you. When you talk about your children, you're there to protect and take care of them.
- SK3 As time went on, though the role changed. I worried about him.
- AK3 Not the same way

SK4 No – I just wanted to make sure he was ok. But I also remember a social worker saying to me when my mother wasn't well, always remember one thing, they didn't get to this age by accident. Respect their wishes and what they want. And I did think about that. And remember saying that to you when, at the memorial services that my father's greatest fear was to die an invalid. His father did, his mother did, his brother did, and his sister did. And he died within a week. And I think the smile on his face in some ways when I looked at him in the casket was almost as if to say, I did it my way. Just stop crying, I did it, I left this earth on my own terms. We don't always get that choice. I miss him and I look at his picture every day.

AK4 I miss his jokes.

SK5 Yeah – loads of them. My friends miss them too. But if... It's interesting 'cause I got an email the other day from our son who really adored his grandpa. He said, I don't know if I believe in the supernatural, but I had the weirdest dream tonight. In my dream I was taking a very long trip, longer than I've ever taken. And I came upon a cottage very much like grandma's and grandpa's up in Lake Mohegan. And when grandpa walked into the door he, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, remember, I'm happy. So I said well, maybe he was giving us a message. He said, do you really believe that? And I said, on some levels I do believe it. I said to him, was he eating chocolate? He said, yes, he was happy. And they were both... He said they were both happy. He said... I just remember it... He said... The other thing he said is, I'm not gonna see you for a very long time which to me was another message that says, go home. So I said I felt that.

VLA5 It was very real

SK6 He really had to write me about this dream 'cause he woke up, he felt like he was sitting in exactly the same room. So it was like whooo.

VLA Frank, what do you think?

FG1 Well I've hated losing people I love. And sometimes I actually think that my mother, my father are actually around. And they're not.

VLA6 In what way?

FG2 Sometimes I think to myself, I'll go talk to my folks about this, and... it's... but it doesn't stop me from enjoying other people. I just absolutely hate losing people.

VLA7 When did your parent die?

FG3 Well actually my father died in 1995. And I was obviously much younger then. And he enjoyed my business at the time and we had the funeral in the afternoon and I went back to my business and I had an auction that night. And it was... In my mind I was just saying well he'd enjoy my doing work and having an auction. But with my mother... she died at 96 about six years ago and I had taken care of her for six years. And it was much harder. And actually she became my very good friend in later years. I never realized how good a friend she was. We worked together for twenty years after she retired from being a registered nurse. We had a lot of fun. She enjoyed my antiques business and we had a lot of fun. It's hard to lose your parent, your best friend, and someone I relied on in many regards. And I'm still sad.

AK5 I think the relationship that you had with... I don't think the poem is saying don't love because of being afraid of loss. It's just noting that it's true that with loves, as Shelley said, eventually there's gonna be a loss, an end somehow. I make my living by inevitabilities. But I think it's also how each of us reacts and feels depends upon the relationship we had with the person and the circumstances of the death. Certainly a person goes through a long slide with dementia. I would say that you lose your loved one but you don't know when. Also I noticed both my father's death and Shelley's father's death, our respective siblings had different relationships with the parent and took death very, very differently, at least at that time. How they've reacted since...

VLA8 For example, in what way?

AK6 My brother was in business with my father and my brother always knew better. And when the... They were in the machine tool industry and when that industry started to have problems, my brother was used to a very high life. And my father... I was there... my father said to him, shrink your business, work out of your home, you won't make a fortune, but you'll always make a living. And he didn't listen, he went out of business, he took a job, and his life has been way downhill from there. So he ended up losing my father's business so that when my father died, it was very, very hard for him. And he was afraid to show emotion because how can I show emotion when I've had all these things to say over the years. I felt terrible for him. This is the same guy when my mother died, and that was more sudden, the morning he picked us up for the funeral, he called up on the intercom, this is Harry Rottencrutch, your car is waiting.

SK7 They all took very different positions. Well I had the situation where my father and my brother were – how to put it? – constantly at odds with each other. My brother left home at 21. And part of it he blamed on my father, but a good part of it he didn't want to, but he blamed it on my mother as well. My mother was doting, over protective, and in many ways, if he hadn't run away, he would have suffocated. He had to run away. But he never closed the chapter. The chapter kept on running and running and running. And from the time my mother died in '07, the next time he saw his father, his father was dead. And it was a piece that I always dreaded. That funeral was the funeral that I was gonna dread. And I did.

AK7 'Cause of him, not because of you.

SK8 No, you know when my brother went into the chapel, the first reaction was that's not dad in the coffin. And I wanted to say, who is it? Of course it's dad. And he gave a eulogy and there was a part that he said, I was always proud to be Louis Retskin's son. There's a piece of me that said, please... On the other hand, who was I to judge what was inside of him for thirty years that he couldn't share.

AK8 I think there were two people who hadn't told each other they loved each other.

SK9 That's true. But he was able to tell it to me.

VLA9 You referred to that before. It's interesting, you said, people are gonna die. It's inevitable so I make sure to say, I love you. And some people just can't.

SK10 There is a line that Rabbi Rothman always used to use about live your life as if today was your last day on earth. And the student says, but how do I know? And he goes, ah ha! You don't. So I end each email with my kids with I love you or a heart. Because it might be the last email they get, I don't know. But I like them to know that the last thing on my mind is I love you because that's the last thing they're gonna take. My father's last words is what I take, I love you. When my mother was dying there was a point when they thought it was quite imminent, except she showed them. It wasn't. There was nights when I slept at the hospital because my comment was, I don't want her dying alone. She didn't. But there was a part where I believe she was holding on. And when everybody left the room that afternoon, I sat by her bed and didn't know what she heard and what she didn't. And I put my head next to hers and I said to her, I'm gonna be ok. Daddy's gonna be ok. And even Leigh's gonna be ok – my brother. But if you need to leave, go.

- AK9 Everybody that was around her had that conversation, their own version of that conversation.
- SK11 Right. I stepped out into the hallway, had a good cry for myself, then I heard Andy and my son call me back. It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes. She was gone. She slipped away. And I think on some level, she heard us all say it, it was ok to go.
- AK10 And I had assured her that I would always be with you and take care of you [directed at SK]. Everybody had their own version of that. You know, there was also a very interesting thing. She had had a catastrophic stroke and they actually turned off... they stopped food and everything. But the nurses would say, be careful what you say around her. We don't know what she can hear and doctors would say, nothing, she can't hear. And there was always that debate.
- SK12 But I remember the meeting we had with the doctor where he said, you need to pull the food. And I was... just like the rumination saying, I can't, I can't play God. I just can't do this. I mean it wasn't my decision; it was ultimately my father's. But when we came back to the room, she started expectorating and the doctor said to me, we can either pull or you can watch her choke. And I said... we all looked at each other and I said, you have to do what you have to do. He gave it forty-eight hours and she showed him – it was two weeks. And the nurses would change shifts and they would look at me and they would say, you're still here? And I said, no, I'm not still here, she's still here. She's not ready to go.
- KM2 I would like to think that first of all [to Frank] I think that it's wonderful that you had this relationship with your mother. And of course it is very difficult to let somebody like that go, who became your so close friend. But I'm so happy for you that you had that relationship and also when your father died, that you did the auction for the simple reason because you knew that this was what he wanted you to do. You were on one level so and I realize I don't have that. I don't have any relationship really to my parents. Not that I have none, but I have very, very little so I have had that, you know? And I'm fine with it – that's my choice.

When my husband's grandmother died, she was not doing well at all. She was at home and she woke up and she said, where's Gary. And my mother-in-law called Gary and said, you know I think you should come – these were her words, where's Gary. And I think you should see her, she might be waiting for you. And so we rushed over to her and she was fast asleep. She never really woke up. But Gary took her hand and squeezed it and said I'm here. And she passed away that

night. And that's a very... and she wasn't even that close to Gary. She was really close to her daughter, but you know it was just so nice. It was so nice for Gary to see that meant so much that she needed to... This was the first time that I really was confronted with an old person passing. And it was very meaningful to my husband and I was so happy for him. He has that in his life, you know?

AK11 I wonder if you can... what it means to parents of different kinds... I wonder if you can really complete mourning for the first one until after the second one is also gone because when you lose the first one there is the need to take care of the other parent and be there for the other parent. So I wonder if... It's almost like when you lose the second, it's completing the cycle and you mourn for both of them.

VLA10 I'd be curious what other people think of that idea. [Around the room] You've lost both, you've lost one, etc. That's an interesting thought.

RM2 Before the adult orphan phrase I think completes your comment or your question for me. But on a personal note, my dad was thirteen years older than my mom and he died at eighty-eight. And the next day, as he would want it, we went to a birthday party, I coached a baseball game and then we went to a birthday party. Just keep going – that was his attitude. And I did feel an immediate, I better call my mother to see how she's doing for a couple of weeks until finally she said, enough, you don't have to call every night, I'm fine. And then she moved up here and we kind of developed a... well because of the proximity a fairly interesting relationship, more so than when both of my parents had been alive and living in New York City 'cause I just saw her so much more. But when she passed away it wasn't a happy day by any stretch of the imagination, but I look back and I think WOW that was pretty cool what they both accomplished in their lives, having come over here from Europe during the war, met here. And there was really not very much sorrow or mourning other than the selfishness of, gee I wish they were still around. But they both were fairly old. They both passed away fairly quickly so I didn't have that real mourning sense when my mom passed away other than all the crap that we still have in the house that I haven't unpacked, but... it's only been four years – three years.

SK13 Well, when my dad died, I thought to myself, if I can accomplish as much as he did in 94 years and to go back to his desk after the funeral and look at the fact that he wasn't really ready to go. He had every party, every... he was going on a cruise, he was going here, he was going there. I mean he was 89-years-old and he went to Israel for two weeks... because my mother never wanted to travel. And

exactly a year later he said to me, do you mind if I go at the point of mom's yartzeit? GO! What are you waiting for? You're 89-years-old. Go!

And during that time being away, he started to realize he wasn't feeling well. And my dad, he was on... he sent emails, and he didn't remember the time difference. So I'd wake up in the morning and find the email that he wrote way back. He says I got pain in my jaw, pain in my shoulder. He said maybe... you know you've got insurance on the trip – come home. And when he came home, we met him at Newark at 6:00 in the morning. He had a terrible cold. And I said, you know what? Instead of taking the next leg to Florida, stay here. I've got a rebooking fee. I said I'll pay it. No. He went and he flew to West Palm and then drove down to Ft. Lauderdale. Next morning Andy calls me at work and says your father's in the hospital. He drove himself to the hospital. Why? Because he didn't like the hospital near his apartment. He wanted the one over there.

AK12 I wonder if there's a different sense of loss when someone, an elderly person who's had a really full life and done it their own way dies, as opposed to someone who either lived to an old age, but didn't take advantage of it or God forbid, a younger person, if there's a difference in the way we mourn, in the way we feel.

JM5 I definitely think so. Absolutely. I know my mom was in failing health and in pain for a good six months probably. And she wasn't just basically happy. And honestly, it was a relief. She... she... it was a relief. And my dad is still alive, but my dad is confused, totally confused.

AK13 [Jokingly] Is he a congressman?

VLA11 That's for a different focus group.

JM6 But he himself is happy in his existence. I have no idea... Yesterday he told me he wanted a silver horse. I told him, sounds good. But he's totally confused, but I think too it will be different feeling. But it's interesting because I know that when my mom was passing away... at the end we had her in the Jewish Home and she was... In the last five days he couldn't go see her anymore. And my mother told me he can't come to see her anymore. It was not healthy for him or for her. He couldn't cope and so I'll never forget it was, I don't know 6:30 in the morning or something, and I was with my mom. Maybe it was a little earlier and she passed away. And I went home to my parents' house and my father took one look at me walk through the door and he burst into tears. He wouldn't get out of bed for two days after that. But he burst into tears. He was inconsolable. All he had to do was

see that I was there and he knew it was over. I was coming home to tell him. Uch, it was horrible. But ya know, so yes, yes I do think there's a big difference between losing a child or when somebody's really young or... and also how they decide... I had a friend that committed suicide. And I have another friend that died from AIDS even though he wasn't gay. And I mean there are all sorts of things that get wrapped up into... I think it does make a very big difference in how you view and approach their death.

SK14 In our family on my father's side every generation lost a child. My grandmother lost a child during the flu epidemic in 1918. My father was born right after that. My aunt lost a child from measles encephalitis – she was 9-years-old. And my brother lost an infant to SIDS. So the week my father died... my father died on the 12th of February, his daughter's birthday would have been February 14th. And I got a text from him. He said, today is my daughter's 14th birthday – oh wait, I don't have a daughter any more. I mean he has two other children and a child from his wife's first marriage. That was a hard... I felt for him 'cause that was a hard week for him. It was a hard week for everybody, but it was also the birth of his child that didn't survive and the death of his father, one that he didn't resolve some issues with and the other he never saw develop. So it was, it was, it was tragic. It was really tragic. But my dad... going back to my father... when I retired four years ago, I came to realize that I was really more like my father than my mother although I had always grown up being just like mom. But when she left, I realized I was really more like my father. My father said to me I'm gonna give you this piece of unsolicited advice. You better stay busy, and I said, well why? He said 'cause God has more trouble hitting a moving target. And I thought about that the other day and I said I guess he was right – my father died in bed. And I realize that what he's saying about being busy is because he knew me, he knew I was really more like him than I was like my mother. So I've tried to keep busy, to take his advice to heart, to stay busy.

SN2 So I was just thinking about what Frank was saying before and it was making me think about Dahni. Both Dahni's parents have died and his mom died first and his mom was really the one who kept the house going. She really was a *baalabusta*. She took care, good care of her husband and so she died first and that left his dad alone and then he ended up dying a few years later. But during that time, whenever Dahni used to call home, he always talked with his mom. His father hardly ever got on the phone. And although he knew his dad loved him, they didn't know how to talk to each other, really. And there just weren't conversations. His mom would share with him what happened, what was going on, and whatever. And he enjoyed, I'm sure, hearing stories about what was going

on, I'm sure, but he just didn't get on the phone. If he did, it was like Hi. How are you? Good-bye. That's how fast it was. But when his mom died, all of a sudden, that wasn't happening. And Dahni and his dad... you know, his father lived in Israel and Dahni was here and they talked every single day. Ya. So they actually became close and became friends. They'd sit and talk and laugh about things and every single day. And that wouldn't have happened if he had gone first. So...

JM7 She gave him a gift.

SN3 Ya – so it was sort of a gift because it really, really just developed, this relationship from where there was almost nothing. And then Dahni went to Israel to be there a couple of times. But at the end, he was there and he was really there in the trenches taking care of his dad and I know his dad really trusted him.

VLA12Dahni has a brother –

SN4 Yes and he was actually living in his brother's house, but it wasn't the same. It was like Dahni can be maternal whereas his brother can't. So they had a very good close relationship in those last few years.

AK14 SK and I had very different experiences with the surviving parent. My father – I can't say he... He stayed like himself, except my mother was no longer there to foster communication so he... it was a very unsatisfactory relationship. SK's father came into his own and I actually formed a very close relationship with him in those years, closer than I ever had with my father.

JM8 That was the same with your mom.

RM3 She was just being polite to you.

JM9 She became much more independent and her personality expanded. She was always expansive. She became more self...

VLA13How many years between your father's death and your mother's death?

RM4 15

VLA14That's a lot of years to become more expansive

RM5 I mean she would... she had a far more extroverted personality, yet always felt it was not proper to be the wife in that generation. Not that my father was overbearing – just the opposite. That was the position that she took and my mother's friends would say, WOW, what's happened to your mother in the last few years. She's just gone nuts. And in a very positive way.

SN5 Yeah – she was really a fun lady.

RM6 I don't know whether that relationship going to one's place in a marriage that was I think more of our parents' generation. I don't think that's gonna happen again. And I think then it was more... at least what I saw with my parents' friends and my relatives, that that was more the norm of more the woman was not working, the woman's place was in the home so to speak. Not that there's anything wrong with it, but it was more acceptable and I think that's gonna change.

VLA15Frank, was that your experience in terms the years between one death and the other.

FG4 Right.

VLA16And your father was first –

FG5 Yeah, in '95.

VLA17So did you see a change in your mother when she was on her own? Sound like you had a change in your relationship.

FG6 Well, she enjoyed herself very much. My father was very dominating and with him gone, she really enjoyed having all her girlfriends come to the store and they had a party there every day.

KM3 Same with my next door neighbor. Her husband passed away and she is traveling, she is enjoying her grandchildren. They came after he passed. And we look at her and we think, gee this was really the best thing that happened to her. It's a terrible to say that, but her husband was holding her back. I'm glad I don't have a husband like that.

FG7 I had a nice dream about my mother a couple of years afterwards, after she passed away. When I was in my youth, I had a corvette and my folks used to like to borrow the car and have a good time. And in my dream I was living in a nice

house. I was married, but I really couldn't see my wife. I'd been divorced. And my wife came up to me and said your mother's outside. And she had driven up in a brand new corvette. And went to go get cleaned up to go see her. By the time I got down to the front door, she had a smile and drove off. But she was having a good time.

AK15 I wonder how your families' norms around loss and particularly how the person that has passed acted around losses when they occurred over the years and encouraged you to act, or taught you to act affects... if the person was a stoic and you can't be a stoic when he dies or she dies and how that affects us.

VLA18 So what's your experience with that?

AK16 Well, over the years I've done a lot of training and therapy to become the person that I really wanted to be probably back when I was in college. So I'm more sensitive to people. My father really outwardly wasn't that way. And my mother... I don't know how you describe it. Everything was a secret with her. And no emotion to the point where SK and I were in synagogue with them one Friday night and we found out for the first time – it was announced from the bima – of the death of a friend's husband. It had just happened. And SK reacted. Naturally, my mother was going, don't show emotion out of the side of her mouth. That's how they were. So do we need permission to cry when they die? And do we feel less of ourselves because we feel that way?

VLA19 So when your parents died, how did you respond to their death?

AK17 I made my mind up when it happened. Well, with my mother particularly, I made my mind up that the only way to get through this experience was to really live it and feel it. As opposed to my brother with the Harry Rottencross jokes acting like it never happened on the way to the funeral. And I just really encouraged myself to live it and feel it. And I thought that was pretty healthy. When my father died it was... because he'd gone through the dementia for so long, and because he was who he was, I felt... We went down to Florida for the funeral, came back, felt pretty low for a day, then felt I was pretty much back to normal, still thinking about it, but it wasn't the same like there had been so much that had gone on around it.

SK15 And it had been a long goodbye.

AK18 Oh boy.

SK16 Interestingly, when my mother-in-law passed away, our son was seven, and we went down to Florida and he stood in her bedroom and he went to get a piece of paper and he left a note on the bed. And he wrote, dear God, please take good care of my grandmother. He left it on her pillow. My father-in-law who was unemotional though, found it. He rolled it up and put it in the coffin with her. Fast forward, this past February, my father dies and his great-grandchild is seven. And John had told her that Grandpa Louis died and she understood the concept because unfortunately there was a girl in her dance troupe who died. She had cancer. She was making these chain bracelets. And she came to him and she had a bracelet in a plastic bag. And she never knew about this letter her father had written. And he was flying to meet us in Florida and she put it in his hand and said, could you give this to Grandpa Lou to take with him? And he did. He slipped it into his pocket.

AK19 I think largely my parents were so void of emotion. They were nice people and they did the best they could with what they had. And we have all the good medications when they were sick. But we always stressed love and feeling with our kids.

KM4 I have no doubt about that.

VLA20 So to the question does how your parents reacted to death when it occurred when you were children, how did it inform your reaction to death that you've experienced? That's your question, right?

AK20 Yeah, and how does it feel if you don't react that way?

VLA21 Differently

AK21 Yeah, I mean I can remember very well when my father's father died years ago. An aunt would say your father was so brave at the funeral. He just bit his lip. Ya know –

VLA22 Isn't that a bit of a cultural thing maybe not to the degree of your parents and your family, but I do a bereavement group I'll hear people, and not just in the bereavement group, and they're moved to tears and they're talking about the loss of parents. Oh I'm so sorry... they apologize and feel that somehow they're doing something inappropriate.

JM10 That may not be the case. It might be because they feel that they are over-imposing their emotions on somebody else.

AK22 It's more subtle in men though.

JM11 I don't know. Women do that too because they get overly emotional and they feel that they don't want to burden somebody with your pain.

VLA23 Yes, but why not?

SN6 I'm thinking about that question about how our parents modeled for us. So in my family my father's mother... my parents brought her to come live in their house and they had hospice in the house. And it was something that we all wanted to do to have her close by and so it's like I actually... Other than the fact that I saw her when she died, she looked scary to me and I wish I didn't have that image in my mind. But aside from that it was kind of a very loving experience having her there. And yet my mother, all she ever says is your father and I don't want to be a burden to any of you. They do not want that what they modeled for us. They don't want us to have to have it take over our lives or something. But that's kind of interesting because that's not what they did.

And my mother's parents, her father died of a heart attack and he died within a few days and it was fast. But my grandmother moved from Florida to Texas, where her two sons lived, and lived in an assisted living place, had a great time, made tons of friends, played canasta, had a boyfriend even. She was just having a great time and then she turned 90 and maybe a month after she turned 90 she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and she was dead within five weeks or something. But her sons, so my mother was going back and forth a lot to be with her in Houston and the two sons lived there and the whole family was there all the time with her. So it's just kind of interesting that my mom always says that we don't want to be a burden to you guys. What does that mean?

VLA24 I'm just curious – what do you say to her when she says that?

SN7 I say to her... 'cause we've talked about... one time I said maybe we should move to another house so we have a room that's on the ground floor that you guys can... Oh no you wouldn't want to do that, and she's like you don't want to live with us or with me, you don't. And I'm like, I could, I could live with you. But she's like No you don't want to. The only one who actually lived in our house was my father's mother and she was a doll. She was not the kind of person that

put guilt or Oh woe is me at all. She was a very independent and thoughtful person. I have to ask my mom more about that.

SK17 In terms of watching my parents, I think a lot of their reaction to losses was based on the relationship they had to begin with their family. My mother's father died very young. I was only 18 months old. And for most of my life I heard a lot about him. My grandmother on the other hand, her mother was a very cold and very undemonstrative woman. And I will always remember that the night before my grandmother died, my mother came home and looked at me and said, do you know that for the first time in my life I heard my mother say I love you. The next morning my mother was gone. And I think that's something that my father remembered because the night before he died... I love you. But I had heard it before and my mother never really got to say that at the end to me, although I saw her a week before. She was in the hospital with pneumonia and I remember saying to Andy in the elevator I don't think I'm gonna ever see her again.

AK23 I remember thinking it when we were in the room saying goodbye to her.

SK18 And I felt like I had to get out of there very quickly because I just didn't want to see her have her see me break down. I kept saying I gotta go, I gotta catch the plane, I gotta go. To some extent I think I regret it, but I think she knew I needed to make that exit.

AK Maybe she did, too.

SK19 Maybe...

RM7 You just said something that triggered a thought with me. And I've told our older son who is the bigger of the nuckleheads. He was telling me that dad you're so stupid. And I told him the story about Mark Twain who said it's amazing how stupid my father became when I turned 14 and how smart he turned when I turned 21. And then on his 21st birthday, he patted me on the shoulder and said, you've still got a ways to go. And I wonder whether we realize how smart and how mature and how caring elderly people are when we start talking about these things and we realize how much they know when they're close to their own demise and how they're able to in very poignant ways, verbal or not, impart that which from what I've heard, and certainly from what I've seen in my life, it is such an incredibly powerful reinforcement of all of the core values that they've been trying to instill for so many years. And I hope I don't screw that up when my time comes.

To answer your question, both my parents were... again, because of the generational thing and because they were both in the middle of generations in their families. Oddly enough my mother's family is very large and she was in the middle of generations. And I am the same way. So there was a lot of seeing elderly people pass away. And my father's family was much smaller. But nonetheless, both of them reacted with their sensible, serious, but sense of humor that has clearly... I mean that's what I'm like, more the humor than the sensible part. And when I had to give both of their eulogies, it was a battle to not laugh or not cry at times. And I could just see I got this ridiculous way of communicating sorrow from the two of them. So I think the way they reacted to death was just part of their personality and that part has just become – yeah it happens. And you deal with it, and you deal with it sincerely, but you also deal with it, in my case, with a bit of humor, or maybe too much humor. But you can't do anything about it anyway at that point.

AK24 You said that in times of mourning humor gets very sharp... all of us. Also you said something... You said something about elderly people communicating their values. It's also probably an opportunity for them to communicate it to you as an adult as opposed to... you're not sonny boy anymore.

SK20 Were your parents Holocaust survivors? Or did they...

RM8 They got out before... my father's brother was killed in a camp. His sister went to Israel and spawned a monstrously large family. And they both... my mother went to Germany and my father wound up in Maine and then got arrested because he was an illegal alien carrying a gun so they put him in the army. But to answer your question, sort of.

JM12 Sort of... which may have affected their viewpoint on death.

RM9 Oh yeah, absolutely.

SK21 Because of the slaughter, they came to accept it? Or just deny it. 'Cause most of my friends who are children of Holocaust survivors, they often talk about how their parents have always steeled themselves in denial that yeah, it's gonna happen, but I don't talk about it.

AK25 You raise a really interesting point because there is that famous book... I forget the name. Viktor Frankel. [Man's Search for Meaning] He was in the camp for

years and how he survived by keeping his outlook positive and not letting... So that's a good point about Holocaust survivors.

VLA It puts a whole other layer on everything surrounding death and dying.

KM5 I was 8 when my mother passed away. And we had lived in this country and I'm German originally. It took six months to transport her body with my father, six months because my father was severely injured. He was injured, he survived. So his kids were shipped out to relatives and he came with my mother and my little sister.

SN8 So the accident happened in the US?

KM6 Yes, yes it did.

SN9 When you told it last week I was imagining it in Germany.

KM7 Yah... so we just had established our new life at my grandparents' house. My grandmother was the nicest grandmother you can hope for. And I remember my mother's funeral very well because we were not told that it was her funeral. We were not... nobody spoke about my mother anyway. And all these people would come and they would bring us gifts and they were treating us nicely and they were listening to us and we had no idea really. And I was 8-years-old. And we still have pictures of the funeral. Nothing was taken at the graveside. Not one picture. But you know pictures of us kids lots of people sent to my grandparents afterwards just to show that they recognized us. It wasn't traumatic for us. I just always resented the fact when I found out that it was my mother's funeral that we were not part of it. As a child, but that was my father's choice as everything else that has to do with disease or death. My father would never talk about it.

When my father-in-law passed away, my son was 18 months, my daughter was 3 and we took them to the service, to the graveyard, and I made sure they would understand somebody passed away. And I don't think I did it because I felt I missed out maybe on something because I remember my mother's funeral as a positive thing. You get gifts and everybody is nice to you. But I think I did it because I wanted to be so different from what I was brought up with. And up to this point my father couldn't talk about anything related... that's how I grew up. And it's very different in this country. I think that people are much more open, people discuss things. I'm happy I'm here for that. But even when their great grandmother died, I made sure the kids understood what we were doing.

JM13 Well I had said last week that I remember I had not really experienced death. When my grandmother passed away, I was in college and my parents gave me a phone call and just said she died. I was very close to my grandmother. She'd been... we had moved her to a nursing home at that time. But there was never a funeral or anything and they said don't even come back from college. And I didn't and it didn't seem unusual to me 'cause I had no context. Nobody I knew had passed away. I didn't know what the deal was. And so that's how she passed away and I don't even think I ever... I never understood how my mother's father passed away. He just wasn't there anymore. So in my perspective people just went away and that was that.

Then Ray's father passed away. It was the first time I sort of had to experience it as an adult. And I thought... I was trying to make life as comfortable as possible, but I saw it from the kids' point of view and I remember this distinctly. I guess there had been a service and I was walking downstairs with Todd and I guess with Brenda and Alan and we were walking down the stairs and Todd said to me after the service, he said, so where is Opa? And I didn't know how to answer. He's walking ahead of me and I could feel Brenda and Al and they were listening and I thought, Oh my God. I said well, ya know 'cause he had been cremated. I said he's in New Jersey. And he said no, no. Todd was like this big [she indicates the size of a child] and he said, where's the body? And there was no body. So I explained to him that he had been cremated, and that some people believe that you bury people and you visit the graveside and others feel that the body burned and you really remember people in your heart and that's the way we chose to remember Opa and that's the way it is. And he said, Oh. And that was it. And that's all he needed. He just needed some sort of context and explanation. Well, fine. Then years later, Rita passed away and we had the service. And I'll never forget, they said to me, let me have your credit card. And I thought oh my God. So they said we want to buy something.

RM10 That was two days before the service.

SN10 Who's the they?

JM14 Our boys. Yeah, let me have your credit card. I thought, uh oh. So on the day of the memorial service... red was Rita's favorite color, absolute favorite color in everything. So they both showed up at the memorial, they had bought bright red shirts which they wore and I think a red tie in honor of Rita. And that was their way. They weren't really comfortable speaking. They spoke a little bit, but to

them they were honoring her in their way and I thought that was really terrific, that was a terrific thing. I feel like regardless of what we go through at our generation, I think, I may be wrong, but we're passing along a positive perspective on death. I think you learn that from your parents, and as we're talking about it... or your families. For whatever reason, I feel like we're doing one thing right I think, and that is that.

AK26 What I think you're doing right is you're giving the message that however each person wants to experience it is ok.

JM15 Yeah, and that it's not a terrible, terrible thing that you... I mean regardless if something happens and it's shocking you can mourn it, there's nothing wrong with mourning. But it's not... it doesn't have to be totally devastating, I don't think.

SN11 You know DN's parents, because they were in Israel and it's a lot... DN went back and forth two or three time with both of his parents, but I didn't go because if I went, we'd have to bring the kids also, and they were little and it was a huge trip and expensive. So I wasn't there at the end or at the funeral for both of his parents and I guess I myself don't feel terrible about that, but I know that DN's brother thinks negatively toward me because of that. But his parents loved me a lot and I loved them too, and we had a very warm and easy relationship which they didn't have with their son that lived down the street from them. So I feel ok about it, but I am aware that his brother is kinda...

AK27 Why do we get so busy judging how other people act and react in those situations?

KM8 To distract ourselves?

JM16 We make ourselves feel better.

KM9 Right, and we are just doing the right thing.

JM17 I know even now when my father... when I asked the kids do you want to go see Opa and Todd would be the first to say no. He just doesn't want to... he can't deal with. It's fine. I respect that it's just too upsetting to him. It's not the man he remembered, but it bothers the hell out of my sister. Why can't they go and say blah blah blah. Or why... 'Cause they need to internalize what he means to them

that's between the two of them. But it is very upsetting. People are so judgmental. It's ridiculous.

VLA25 About a lot of things, but I think about how people respond during the death of a loved one. I asked questions on the survey, who was the caretaker? Was it you or was it another family member? And who's the executor. And that gets into some very edgy stuff that's very real. And one of the things in thinking about our own deaths is when you observe what the death of people can do to families, you want to think that your children are going to maintain a relationship. I know we'll make it really easy 'cause we've got nothing to leave so there'll be no fights over economics.

AK28 There are family businesses where the parents... they many not say it, but they're afraid to retire and leave 'cause they don't know how the kids are gonna get along in the business.

VLA26 Which is off topic, but on topic. We kind of came around to that whole area of caretaking in the twilight and then caretaking after and how that impacts our ability mourn a death, our ability to prepare for our own end. And maybe a good place to just stop and reflect for the week, not in a negative way. But I think we had some rich conversation and I hope everybody felt the space to speak when they wanted to and didn't hold back in anyway more than you wanted to. Thank you all for being part of this moment. Let's just take a moment to just breathe and take each other in.

SN12 It's nice to have these conversations that we don't usually have with people, other people. I know last week when we shared with our... The question last week was what our experience was with death. What colored your perception of death. So each person shared and I know these guys [JM and RM] pretty well, and I know KM pretty well, and I learned so much about everybody. 'Cause when would we ever sit and have this conversation? So this gives us an opportunity just to have this conversation.

SK22 A smallest piece that I'm gonna take away of being a member of Shir Ami... Friday night saying to AK, I felt like I was sitting in somebody's living room and shared. And that Shabbat felt like it was an institutional Shabbat. It was sitting in a family Shabbat and it made a whole lot of difference, which is what I feel like tonight. It's being enveloped which is a very different feeling.

Appendix G: Focus Group 3 June 30, 2014

This is the only session I gave to someone else to transcribe and she erased most of the recording

FG, RM, KM, DN

VLA1 Today we're going to talk about the economics of growing old and dying. So when I say that, the economics of growing old and dying, which has changed dramatically from when our parents were living... I'm reading this amazing book called *Never Say Die: the myth and marketing of the new old age*. And we're all part of the new old age where we're living 30 years beyond the traditional age of retirement. And that has lots of ramifications in terms of our physical health, our mental health, and our economics, our personal economics, our family economics, and the economics of the country, the political economics. And that's so much of what the in-fighting is about between the parties. I'm not interested in getting into a political debate, but in what this all means for you personally in caring for your parents, and in preparing for your own caring, how you think about it in relationship to you, what you, what you prepared for, what it's gonna mean for your children.

When social security was voted in in 1935, the Social Security Act, the income and the amount that was put in to social security and the amount that that generation benefitted from social security was dramatically... the gap made sense. Today even if you put in for a lifetime of working, it doesn't give back what we need for those thirty extra years. In 1935 the life expectancy was 62, the average life expectancy. Today the average life expectancy is into the 70s and 80s. I don't know the exact number, but most people now are living into their 80s and 90s and 100s. Remember on the Today Show Willard Scott wishes happy birthday to everybody over 100. He used to come on every few months and named a couple of people to wish them a happy birthday. Today this list is endless and he's on much more often. But that's the reality and it has very serious economic ramifications. It also has an effect on medicine in terms of medical/ethical decisions. All of this gets into the realm of ethical/economic decisions, ethical/medical decisions. There was no such thing in 1935 as penicillin or polio vaccinations with medical miracles. Heart disease – I wouldn't be walking around with a stent that didn't exist. So I go back to my original question, when I say the economics of growing old and dying, what comes up for you?

RM1 My first reaction was laughter which is typical, but it's based upon the following scenario where my mom and dad had both gotten ill, but had passed away fairly quickly. And we started talking to the kids about... we're gonna start spending money a lot, cause we're gonna wind up spending your inheritance. And we had just taken out long-term care insurance. And our older son Todd, who's in the

insurance business said, make sure you keep paying those premiums because if you stop paying your premiums, because you're now 75 or 80, you really are gonna spend our inheritance. So there's that whole economic... to me it's fairly cut and dry mathematically. We're living longer, we're living longer and allowing medicine to make ourselves, allow ourselves to live longer, at least physically. And we aren't working any longer and/or saving any more money. But bringing it back to a little bit of a serious nature, what I've realized from seeing with what's happening to my folks and JM's folks really don't know so you have to try as best you can to save because – WOW – in 20 years I'll be 80, big deal, and I could last another 15 years. And that becomes really challenging economically because that was not the case years ago. So then it becomes a real trade off of do we want to go out and spend \$200 on dinner this weekend or do we want to put it somewhere?

[Dahni arrives for the first time]

VLA2 So you know everybody right? Today the topic that I'm presenting is the economics of growing old and dying which has ramifications personally, in your family, with your parents, your children. It has ramification in how society deals with the fact that we're living 30 years, give or take, longer than in previous generations, especially in relationship to social security. The Social Security Act was written in 1935. The life expectancy was 62. But today the idea of retiring first of all is something that we xx. We can't afford to retire, and I don't know what I'd do for the next 30 years. But mostly there are economic ramifications. The question is when I say the economics of growing old and dying, what comes up for you.

RM2 I'm really glad you came because my next comment was... and I think you said last week, you said something about the denial of old age or something that to me triggered the... It's not selfish, but it's this whole generational view of, yah, I'm not gonna get old. And there are middle aged idiots who get their knees fixed so they can continue playing another 10 years of soccer. Where a generation ago it would have been, ok it's time to sit on the sidelines and let the young people play.

DN1 Well, I'll give you an example. My father was 83 and I'm getting an emergency call from my brother. And he told me a story. His friend was riding a car parked on the side, he opened the door and an old man hit him on the door, fell down from his bicycle. When my brother's friend came to help him, the man just brushed himself off and kept riding. I mean, not that it was my brother's father, my father. So he called my brother and said what is going on? And my brother got very upset and called me to tell me to tell dad to stop riding his bicycle. Now, my

father never learned to drive a car. He rode a bicycle all of his life. And I told my brother very straight forward, I could fear that my father will get killed in a car accident, God forbid, then go home and just until his time will come. Does this answer your question? I play soccer on Sunday and I hurt my hamstring very badly. It's ok, but you know what I'm saying. I'm not going to parachute or bungee jump or do crazy things. I play soccer. But this is the story I always tell people – you know, my father died a year later from cancer, but...

VLA3 And how old was he?

DN2 He was 84. What comes to my mind when it comes to the economics? In Israel at least, my family... it was very simple. When my mother got leukemia, it was never a question of moving her out of the home. She got the care at home. And I mean just to take her to the doctor I had to call an ambulance because they were the only one who had the special whatever to take her down the... they lived in an apartment building on the third floor only with stairs. So just take her to the regular doctor, I needed to call the ambulance... not an emergency ambulance... just to take her to the doctor and to bring her back. And my father cared for her and when it was difficult, we hired foreign worker, someone who came from Rumania or Poland and she helped my mom until she... she died at home.

VLA4 And in Israel was that paid for by the family or was it covered?

DN3 No, that's paid for by the family. And she died really fast, a year or two years, she died. If it had happened in twenty years, I don't know. I mean I assume that I probably would get much less inheritance. And I told my parents, their health is more important. But there's... yes, for the ambulance, part of it was paid by the administration. And then when my father got sick... I mean he was battling prostate cancer for thirty years. And eventually it started to metastasize in all of his body and it came to his spine and he had horrible pain in his back and he... I took him... I used to go back and forth... and I took him to do radiation. And they managed to alleviate the pain, but they hit his spine and he couldn't walk. So here's a man who is 83 years old on a bicycle and he has to go in a wheelchair. And then he moved to my brother so my brother cared for him. So he hired somebody 24/7/6 with him. One day he got off and we hired somebody else, but again, my father paid for that. But I guess at that point it was a little bit cheaper than this country to hire somebody like that. I don't know. I still don't have long term disability insurance.

RM3 Todd told us, don't stop paying your premiums because you're going to be spending our inheritance if you get sick.

VLA5 Do you have long term care insurance?

RM4 Yeah, when we saw what happened to Jack, his mom, for only 6 months, we said ... my parents were within two months of not really being able to really move, but her dad's been sort of pleasantly losing his marbles for the last two years and he's now got 24 hour care for 7 days a week. It's a lot. But you can talk to Todd about the insurance issues after the meeting.

VLA6 That's part of it, that's a very, very expensive insurance, long term care.

RM5 You run the odds, God forbid, if something were to happen.

KM1 Well I have to ask my husband what we have. I never thought about it... pretty bad if you think about it. I just really... this is something that Gary would take care of. We've talked about his mother who is 87 and lives on her own and she has Parkinson's, that's not going to kill her, but she has it. And it will disable her more or less eventually. So we have discussed that, but she is very clear about what she wants to do and I guess she's taken care of it financially, she has some sort of insurance. Other than that, we've never discussed it. So I would do that

VLA7 Most people don't talk about long-term care insurance, and most people don't have it. People have life insurance, people have health insurance, there are people who don't, but if you have insurance, that's usually what you have. Is it because we don't think of ourselves old and infirm?

DN4 I'm looking at the economic thing and at this point it's really too expensive for me, so I decide to... it as long as I can. It's really expensive.

VLA8 It's very expensive, but there's a point, there's an age at which you can't even get it.

KM2 What is the age?

VLA9 I don't know, but the idea of insurance is that ...

RM6 It's a horrible calculation but it costs about \$250 a day to \$400 a day for home care so you multiply that out by a week and it's \$2000 to \$3000 dollars. Over the

course of a year, it's somewhere around \$150,000 to \$200,000. So it becomes... to your point it's yeah, I can see myself getting old, and I can see myself then eventually falling, breaking a hip, having a concussion and 2 weeks later I'm gone. Boy I really spent a lot of money on long term care and I didn't really need it. And you rationalize it, because if you don't use the long term care insurance, you don't get anything back. With life insurance I guess people feel, Okay, I'll die, and when I die, whoever I've designated will at least get this blob of money. And I think it's an economic issue, and I think it's further exacerbated on the one hand by all of us living longer, and potentially years of needing to be taken care of. And on the flip side, yeah, but I'm going to be one of those people who's playing golf till he's 85, and then I'll take up another hobby and then when I'm 103 I'll have a heart attack and that'll be it.

VLA10 Yes, and there's only so much income in any given family and let's see ... long term care health insurance or college tuition?

KM3 Can I ask what we're talking about price-wise ?

DN5 It depends on the age.

RM7 It depends on... It's basically how big of a bag of money do you want to have. You can get coverage for \$100 a day, \$200 a day, \$300 dollars a day. Over how many years do you want to have that money available to you? For 2 years, for 3 years, for 10 years, for your life? And then how quickly do want it to be starting to be paid? You want to get reimbursed after 30 days of being incapacitated, 60, 90, or 180? So all of those parameters make up... and I think, JM and I, I think we're paying something like \$10,000 or \$11,000 a year for the two of us. And we started it early where it was not as expensive, and the company that we went with, it's relatively flat pricing. But I think that the real issue is \$10,000, \$8,000, \$15,000 versus college tuition, or a second house, travel, or even more basic things.

VLA11 For some people, versus, food, shelter. What do you think, Frank?

FG1 It's out of my price range

VLA12 So your sister is at Nathaniel Witherall, for example, how is that managed from an economic point of view?

FG2 The state of Connecticut. She's very fortunate.

KM4 How did she get in there?

FG3 Well, she had a bunch of problems and she was there for rehab and some other problems, and somehow or other they decided to see if she could stay there.

KM5 And she's happy there?

FG4 I guess you could say so for the situation, yes. Better than living at home by yourself, unattended.

VLA13 Sometimes the question is, is the family happy with the facility? Those who are still making decisions about care. It seems to be a good place, Nathaniel Witherall

FG5 I think so.

VLA14 So it's hard to talk about the economic realities of growing old and dying, and all that's around it. What's hard about it?

KM6 For me, I know I will die one day and so will Gary. I can't see myself being in need of 24/7 care. I haven't thought about it. I always think that if I'm getting into a stage where I can't live on my own, meaning I have to be connected to tubes or whatever, I don't want that. But I can't envision myself being in that kind of a stage. So maybe that's one reason why I never even thought about it. It's okay to die, but the way to get there, that's not part of what I can see, and maybe that's wrong.

VLA15 I'm not suggesting it's right or wrong; I come to this with a curiosity.

KM7 I have to say though, it makes me aware that I'm naïve, and that I should discuss it with Gary. If he hasn't thought about it, I think it would be a good time to discuss it.

VLA16 Well without getting into politics again, isn't that what all the conversation is really about in terms of entitlements, social security, and health insurance and so on. Isn't that part of the conversation in the global sense? And "oh yeah they're talking about me and what's going to happen to me," we don't really think about it; all we see is the infighting. But the issues are very important and real, and the questions have changed as I pointed out from 1935 when the Social Security Act was put into place. The idea of how we as a society care for elderly... the

question really comes down to how do I want to be cared for? How do I believe society should care for me? But the fact is we don't think about that as a reality, I think somewhere in our distant thinking we know that yes, we're going to die, and people die, and we as a society have this idea that talking about death is dark and depressing and we don't want to talk about it. But I wonder if we talk about it, deal with it, and it's true and real, then we can get on with living. Rather than all of a sudden being faced with the crisis of illness and death, but rather, have prepared emotionally, spiritually, as well as economically.

Appendix H: Focus Group 4 July 14, 2014
FG, AK, SK, RM, DN, SN

VLA1 This book is *Never Say Die: The Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age*. I recommend this book in terms of facing your own aging, but I would point out that we lived through major medical changes which is partly why we're seeing our parents living so long and why we're visualizing ourselves living so much longer. "Who would deny that we live in an age of medical miracles? The boomer generation has had a ringside seat for the unveiling of each new marvel from the polio shots we received as kids to the stents that are now keeping Dick Cheney and Bill Clinton [and myself] alive. Ours was the first generation for whom antibiotics were always available and the last to spend any part of childhood fearing the scourge of polio. The first medical memory of many of our older boomers, born in 1946, is standing in line to receive the Salk polio vaccine in 1955." (Jacoby p80) 1955. I remember that. "The cultural milieu of the late 1960s and early 1970s – inseparable from but outlasting the prosperity of that time – has been equally important in shaping the conviction that age can be defied. A vital part of that culture, for the oldest and the youngest boomers, was a belief in the possibility of repeated self-reinventions – through therapy, through religious conversion, through self-help, through determined efforts to change the very shape of our flesh – without regard to chronological age." (Jacoby p66) So my question to you tonight is, what are you doing to keep young? And how do you think that's going to affect your next 20, 30 years? What are you doing to keep yourself young?

SK1 Keeping active... I think not just physically active, mentally active. My father had a saying when I retired that God has difficulty hitting a moving target. And he said if you're anything like your father, you better keep busy. And I guess he was right because he died in bed. He wasn't moving. I also know that I ... when my parents were my age, they had already bought a cemetery plot because they didn't

anticipate living very long because their parents didn't...furthest thing from my mom. So I'm actually thinking that even though I retired, I'm really not happy doing nothing. I'm not. So finding alternative activities is to me one of the best ways to stay young and vibrant.

VLA2 So what kinds of things are you doing?

SK2 Well I have done tutoring, but I'm starting to get tired of it. So I'm mulling over different opportunities, but I'm also picking up things that I never found I never had time to do before like learning Mahjong and finding other women who are in the same age group who said my mother played, but my mother didn't work full time like I did. So she had time to play three or four times a week. But I don't. And there's a whole group taking lessons at Temple Shalom because keeping the brain plastic is really... you know that plasticity is really important. It's important and you find that when you play it, you can't think of something else. 'Cause otherwise somebody's gonna pick up the pot. So that and going back and learning how to knit, just things I never had the time to do, now I'm doing it just to keep busy. I'm looking maybe to sub once in a while, do some volunteer work, just to keep busy and keeping that voice in my head that says God has trouble hitting a moving target.

VLA3 So how do others respond to the question, what are you doing to keep young? What does that mean? Is that a value? I don't know...

AK1 Seeking new professional challenges, trying to finally get this thing, the practice of law, right.

VLA4 You're going to keep practicing till you get it right.

AK2 Oh, no one ever does. Like everybody else I have my bug-a-boos, my work style and everything. And I find myself working really hard keeping my mind active 24/7. I mean constantly thinking, trying to put this together with that. And also I've been listening to a lot of psychology books and books like that on audible. But I find that even if I'm playing solitaire on my phone, I'm always doing something to keep my mind active. I don't know if that's great or not, but ...

SN1 We just had lunch yesterday with friends and they are in their 70s and they were saying that turning 70 was so hard. And she looks like she's 55. They do so many great things with their life. They're part of the Clearwater Walk-About Chorus. And they're singing at Lincoln Center this weekend. So I looked at them I just

felt so inspired by them because they are doing things that are fun and with people of all ages and it keeps them young. And so they used to be our neighbors in Hartsdale and they were my role models then. They had teenagers and we had little kids and I thought they were such great parents. And they're still my role models. But my parents also are my role models because they... my dad's 90 and my mom's 86 and they do a lot of fun things in their life. They don't ... they're aging ... their bodies feel like they're aging in certain ways, but they have not cut back on doing fun interesting things. So they're really great role models and I definitely feel like over the last couple of years that life should be fun, should be filled with good moments, good things, and so I feel like I've been a little more mindful than I was in the past about creating those moments, those situations. And I feel like sort of a voice in my head reminding me to keep creating those and enjoying life. And then physically too, I don't do enough exercise at all, but I am conscious of the fact that I better start because our bodies age and if I want my muscles to stay in shape, I have to exercise them. So I haven't yet gotten to that point where it's a daily commitment. It is in my head, but it's not in my actions. And so I do feel like I don't know how much time I have and I'm not yet ... in the conversation yesterday we were saying that it used to be that when people turned 50, they would start thinking about their mortality. And now it's getting older. Then it was like 60, and now it's kind of 70. So I'm 56. I'm not really thinking about the end, but I am thinking about trying to make each day a good experience because who knows how long you have. But I am very conscious of the fact that my dad turned 90. And that can't mean that he has a long time. It's really funny because 80 is pretty old too, but I didn't think about it. But turning 90 I definitely am feeling, thinking more about the fact that the years are limited.

VLA5 You said last week that you see him slowing down.

SK3 Yeah, my dad is aging. He's entitled – he's 90. But I don't like to think about it.

VLA6 So what do you do to keep young?

RM1 I just play games, mentally and physically. I started subbing in January at the high school. And it's just knowing the other people's kids, and you learn all sorts of new words and new expressions. But it's just coaching and teaching kids is to me, it's the ultimate profession where you're reborn every September with a fresh crop of... how many more 16-year-olds are there gonna be? I'm getting older and it's another group of 16-year-olds. That's just something I do sub-consciously. And I just try not to think about, while to me the definition of being old is not being able to physically do as much in a particular day or week. But I haven't yet

crossed over to the... I think I'm gonna go to a museum tomorrow, and I think I'm going to the opera tonight, I think I'll read the paper for six hours today and read a few books. That'll be a nice weekend. NO – I'm not doing that. I've got plenty of time for that. So it's the same thing as what we've all been saying.

AK3 It's about priorities.

SK4 I also think that when my parents were just about my age, they moved into a 55+ community and it's something I don't want to do because my father started to realize... he called it God's waiting room. And there was a building in the complex that my mother pointed out to me one day. She was driving and she pointed and she said, there are more widowers in that building than any other complex. And as she rode by she said, I'm not ready yet. And then I started to realize that one of their past times was going down in the morning and checking the bulletin board to see whose funeral. And I thought Nooooo!

AK4 One thing that struck me was when my mother-in-law died, my father-in-law had this thing. We had to host a luncheon at a restaurant. And it was really important. And I remember trying to get him off that.

SK5 He didn't want to do anything in the apartment after the funeral.

AK5 He felt that ... apparently there is some custom in that community where they do some entertaining after the funeral.

VLA7 Different from shiva?

AK6 Yeah. This is like let's go celebrate the funeral.

VLA8 So what do you think that was about?

AK7 I think he was just trying to maintain what he thought was social conventions.

VLA9 But what's the social convention about? What do you think that ...

AK8 I don't know what it's about. I really never really thought much of it. It seems to me that if I'm trying to comfort someone who's lost somebody, I don't want to put them to any extra effort for anything, let alone host me in a restaurant.

VLA10 So the bereaved, the spouse, would be the host in that community.

AK9 That seemed awfully strange.

SK6 I think there's a piece of it that was like, not us.

VLA11 There but for the grace of God go I?

SK7 Yeah. Let's have dinner or let's have lunch

VLA12 While we still can...

SK8 It's like a musical chairs kind of thing. We've still got chairs. He lost his wife, but we're here and while I can still feed myself... I just had that sense.

AK10 It's more than that. He was feeling a social obligation.

SK9 But I think that's where the social obligation came... I think that's part of the... that became part of that milieu.

AK11 If anything, it was almost like I have to stand on my own with the social niceties now that my wife is gone.

VLA13 I think it's a little of all of the things that you said.

AK11 'Cause I remember even walking out of the service, and I had my arm around him, and he's greeting people. Oh Jack, thank you for coming – come on!! Have a candle lighting ceremony.

VLA14 The Jewish – I don't know if it's a custom or a law – surrounding bereavement is that bereaved and in Jewish practice there are seven people who are bereaved – if you've lost a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a son, a daughter, or a spouse, you are bereaved. That's who wears a ribbon, that's who sits shiva. Those are the people who sit shiva and go through the customs and the laws of bereavement. And among the customs/laws is that when you're sitting shiva, when people come to visit, you don't greet them because you're... the idea is that you are, as you're suggesting, totally engaged in thinking about your loss rather than hosting people, even in your home during shiva.

DN1 As a matter of fact, in Israel, when it comes to shiva they never knock on the door. They just walk in and even just sit down. They don't say, hi, how are you? They just sit down and then the conversation starts. Then you know you're

starting to talk about... some people just come and sit there for an hour and don't say one word and leave. But the bereaver acknowledges them if they can and appreciates that. And then that's the end and that's what shiva is all about. This is something that I never felt in the United States. When I came here, I felt like shiva here is, I don't know... I still didn't get used to the custom here after the death of somebody. And I... fortunately all the death I had here was related to SN's family – her grandparents. But I just didn't feel it.

VLA15 What was missing? You didn't get used to what?

DN2 Exactly what you explained. The bereaved is sitting there. You come any time after the funeral and go to somebody's house, it's more like you came to a brit if you know what I mean.

SN2 But like the last funeral we went to was my friend Arline lost her mom. And afterwards everybody went back to Arline's house and they had... it was a spread on the table and people sat around, but I felt like it was very comfortable for Arline. If she had gone home by herself, she would have been really depressed and instead, she still was depressed, but she was telling stories about her mom, she was hearing stories about her mom. She was showing pictures. Other people showed her pictures. She was just feeling loved by the people that were there. I felt it was a really nice moment.

VLA16 So how does that compare or did that fulfill your experience? Was that closer to what happens in Israel?

DN3 Really in Israel you have a funeral and it was family. Some people come right for three-four hours together and you need to feed them somehow. I understand this point.

VLA17 And part of the Jewish custom and law is to have a meal of consolation. And the idea is that the friends and neighbors make sure that there's food provided for the bereaved as well as for those who are coming for shiva.

DN4 You're right.

SN3 Yeah...

AK12 That's a big difference because we're talking about the family puts out this big spread or cake or something. I wonder if this issue is almost similar to issue I

heard expressed at a former synagogue that Bar Mitzvah parties are getting overly elaborate and taking away from the spirituality.

VLA18The sanctity, the sacredness...

AK13 Yes. Of the Bar Mitzvah and I wonder if there's some relation between these big productions. I wonder how it's done in other parts of the country. Maybe it's sort of like to try to dull the senses.

VLA19There's also the notion that, I don't want to mourn my mother. I want to celebrate her life. And people have referred to that as well. The idea that... exactly that – that we're celebrating her life. It sounds like what you experienced with your friend was more in keeping with the tone that you all... it sounds like you need the tone to be right. Or what is it that you're looking for that is different from your experience? Or have you experienced the kind of...

AK14 At shiva, I like to feel that my presence has done some good, that I've done something or said something, or just listened, that I've done some good. I also want to be one of the ones who's here six months from now, not just today. Not feeling like Oh boy they fed me delicacies that I don't get that often. They gave me lox and bagels and real kosher deli, things I don't get every day. And that this was an occasion to do that.

VLA20Or to simply sit in silence...

AK15 No, I want to do something that's meaningful. I remember once I was at a shiva, it was horrible. He's committed suicide and I was sitting with his mother. He was a mature man so she was quite elderly. And I just sat and listened and afterward she said, Oh was he good, almost like I said something and all I did was sit. I mean, what are you gonna say.

VLA21And she thought you were just...

AK16 the greatest conversationalist.

VLA22You knew just what to say.

SK10 Just nothing.

SN4 [To DN] So what do you do to keep young?

DN5 Well, I don't think I do anything. I'm just living and two weeks ago you made fun of me for still playing soccer. But I never stopped playing soccer. I'm coaching Special Olympics at different venues and I'm still doing that. I'm still cleaning the gutters even though my wife is yelling at me because she's afraid I'm going to fall from the ladder, but I did it all those years and I don't see why I should stop now. I still cut the grass because I did it all those years. So yes, I'm doing it much slower now, I have to say. I'm aware of that and I'm aware of the fact that in soccer I'm not one of the fastest ones as I used to be, but OK. But I'm still doing everything. I guess my point is, what am I doing to stay young? I don't do anything. I just don't stop. Eventually I imagine I will stop at one point, but I don't think about it. And I hope that if I'll stop, it wouldn't happen from an accident, but it will happen on my own terms. But I don't really think about it. I'm not Peter Pan. But I just don't think about it.

AK17 One thing none of us mentioned specifically is mindset. I still think of myself as young, walking around the condominium area, it's them not me. I don't think of myself as one of them although I could be. In my own mind I try to keep the same sense of humor, the same interests. I try to stay young and act young. Shelley thinks I may over do the acting young. But mindset is a big part of it because we all have to... the event I went to fifteen years ago where I was the in prime of the group, now I'm the old guy and I'm gonna do everything I can to stay in the prime.

SK11 When you talk about trying to stay young, I also think it's important to have friends that are not only your age, but younger. As their age group started to disappear, my father pointed out that they still had friends in their early 80s, fourteen years his junior, when everybody else his age was starting to disappear.

AK19 It's getting easier every day to find friends younger than us.

SK12 Yeah, but the thing is he said, I could... he was a radio amateur so there were people in his group who were younger than him that looked up to him. But he also had somebody to talk to. Because he said, my friends are disappearing and I'm the only one around.

AK19 But the fact that he had somebody to talk to was also a function that he kept himself current so he had things to talk with anybody about.

SK13 You also talk about teaching because I retired from teaching four years ago. And I would say that, and I dealt with much younger kids, I was elementary. But it kept my mind, talking to them on their own level in many ways, and their culture. And I had to watch TV so that I could relate my lessons back to the things that they watched. I had to know who Sponge Bob was. I had to be able to relate my lessons back to where they were.

SN5 What age did you teach?

SK14 Grades 3-4-5. And I had to learn to... and also technology, I had to keep up with technology.

AK20 That's a really good point. That's very important.

SK15 I had to communicate... I mean, quite honestly, one of the ways I communicate the best with my own children is this [holds up cell phone and pretends to text].

VLA23And you actually use your thumbs.

SK16 I do.

VLA24WOW!

SK17 I think eventually the next generation will have very large thumbs.

VLA25I've been saying that.

SK18 But technology has also kept me current.

AK21 That's a really good point.

VLA26Technology is a biggie – how's that for each of you?

RM2 The one thing that I find... it's like listening to my parents and my grandmother... the one thing that I cannot keep young is music because so much of what the kids listen to now really does suck. It's not like what we listened to and our parents said was bad music. That was pretty good music. And I keep telling that story. OK I guarantee you in twenty-five years, that music you're listening to will not be found anywhere. And the stuff that I listened that you're still listening to will always be there. And I don't know whether it's because we grew up in a golden

age of music or if we're just deluding ourselves and every generation said the same thing.

SK19 I agree with you because one of the recent concerts that I was listening to from my old elementary school, the kids were singing the Beatles. They thought it was cool. They weren't singing anything that was from today. Sometimes I look and say, is that really talent? What is that? But the kids today are still singing the Beatles.

AK22 And the Beatles were radical.

SK20 The Beatles were considered radical in the 60s.

SN6 The bands from our day really have lasted. They still do concerts.

AK23 And Ray, because of what you just said we have all those radio stations devoted to our music. You know Cousin Brucie is still on. And he sounds just like he did forty years ago.

VLA27How about the groups that you didn't hear from for years and now they're performing again like the Beach Boys. And they look so old, but they sound exactly the same.

SK21 Look at Jersey Boys. They have an international cast all over and people talk about Frankie Valley. Do you remember him? He's 80. He's still singing.

VLA28I think you make a very good point.

RM3 Technology – I think we all kind of struggle with and we know how to tweet, but kids do it 50 time faster than we do. They don't read anymore. Everything is flash headlines.

AK24 And they can't write. They cannot write an actual sentence.

VLA29Grammar –

AK25 Uch

SK22 It's frustrating to me too.

RM4 But they can have three conversations at the same time. And pay equal amount of attention to each one of them. I mean that in a positive sense.

SN7 I've been in a conversation with a group of women and there's two young women in that group. And they communicate verbally very differently from everybody else in the group. And they don't finish their sentences. They start a sentence and they don't finish it and they're on to the next sentence and it's really noticeable because nobody else speaks that way. And they're two really intelligent women. They don't complete their sentences. They're constantly shifting midstream. And when you're just saying this stuff, the texting and having three conversations, it all of sudden occurred to me why do they do that? Because they're so used to conversing and then switching to the next thought. And not staying with the thought.

VLA30I think it started with the Sesame Street notion. Sesame Street was based on the idea that if you observe babies and toddlers playing when the television is on, but when the ten-second commercial comes on they pay attention. And so Sesame Street was based on the ten-second segment. Sound bites. And it was brilliant, but there was backlash which said that...

SN8 We're all ADD

SK23 Well their attention span was diminished. Even as they entered elementary school, you found yourself having to change activities. We used to learn in kindergarten you have to learn to change activities every ten minutes. So when they were in third grade they had only graduated to every fifteen to twenty. Plus it was also they were used to being entertained. In other words, not necessarily engaged, but entertained. So you get observed and your principal said, but was that entertaining?

AK26 The computer took that to a whole new level of entertainment. They want to be entertained.

SK24 And the gaming.

AK27 You can go to Georgia Tech and get a degree in designing games.

SK25 It's a huge field. There was something else on TV— gaming is considered an athletic pursuit.

VLA31 And then Tele-Tubbies. They would do a whole segment and then a little voice would go, Again, again – just like children do when they want to read the same book over and over. And they would play the same segment over again. They loved it just like they want to hear the same book again and again they wanted to see the same segment again.

RM5 To answer your question initially, what do we do to keep young, that's not something I consciously work on. I will try to pay attention to something the first time it happens rather than saying, again again.

VLA32 But that's for the very young, but what you're all saying is that what happens for the very young, because the media and some of the media educational pursuits has taken the observation of the very young way of observing the world and building on it, it's...

AK28 Sound bites, hashtag.

SK26 There's something else that really frightens me is the ability to interact eye to eye is diminishing. I have to admit, my children are somewhat like that although my son is a little bit different in that he's highly verbal, he's a conversationalist. Yet he makes his living being an IT guy. But the kids that are coming up, their greatest communication is Facebook and twitter. But sitting down and having a good thorough warming conversation like this is starting to disappear. And that frightens me because they're becoming isolates. They're perfectly happy communicating in another place, in another time. And they don't necessarily feel like I do to be with people.

RM6 It's very interesting you say that, and I agree with you if I want to have the old style of the line. I noticed probably the second or third day I was subbing and I had to get something done and I was talking to somebody and somebody else came up and was talking to me and I had to get a couple of texts out. And as I was texting I thought, I hope they don't think I'm being really rude – not a clue. Or it was perfectly natural and I think that's not deliberately trying to act young, it's like I have something else to do that is – no offense – more important right now. In this moment I have to get this done because it's gonna affect twenty other people. Your question, I can wait another two minutes 'til I can answer your question. Then as you started, your sort of talking and the need for, I think you said, warming dialogue – I can probably count on all my fingers and toes in thirty-five years of working in corporate, of having a good warming conversation. And thank goodness we had conference calls because I could then put the phone on

mute and do my own work and kind of half pay attention. And I think that's a little bit of the ongoing trend of younger people, but... And again, it's not to your question, what do we do to act young. I think it's more... to me that was just a coping skill. I just can't listen to this crap any longer and I have something else to do. So I'm just gonna sort of give 20% attention there, 80% here, and get my thing done, and then check off, yeah I was on a conference call.

SK27 But that is a corporate world. But I'm talking more on the social...

RM7 But I really don't think that...

AK29 The rule spills over.

RM8 Yeah, I don't think there a, Oh it's 5:00, end of the corporate world, now I have to get into my real pay attention personal social world. I think it all kind of bleeds together.

AK30 And even more so today.

RM9 Well, the kids today, it's like...

AK31 And another question is, where do we draw the line between one to act and be young and staying with our work ethic and our values that we see people deviating from. I think we, as slightly older parents, had some different views with our kids than some of the parents who were just incredibly permissive.

SK28 We sort of raised to different generations. Our son is 35 and our younger is 26 and that 9-year buffer is very, very different because her friends' parents were very much younger than us. When she came along I was 38, almost 39 and she had friends whose mothers had had their children at 22, 23. So I was seventeen years older than many of her parents. And I was thinking differently.

VLA33I'm fascinated that my question morphed from what are you doing to keep young to what are you doing to act young. And I think those are two different questions. And I think it's interesting that is morphed a little bit. You [AK] sort of brought it back with your last comment which kind of repeated where you were.

AK32 Where we draw the line between wanting to act young cause we think that'll make us stay young and staying young, but still adhering to our generational values, our work ethic...

VLA34 which should be global values, but...

AK33 From my perspective, how I would relate with younger lawyers that have a different work ethic, how do I relate to younger clients?

SK29 It brings me back when we were down in Florida with my brother and his wife were there. And her mother is 77 and she said this a number of times. I wish my mother would act her age. And I said, what do you mean? And she said, I think she should act her age so I can find her when I'm looking for her. Or she should be able to pick up the phone when I call her. And I said, she's having a good time. She's enjoying her life. She doesn't need you. You should need her.

AK34 You're right. She's a cool lady.

SK30 She kept... she said this a number of times. My mother should be acting her age. And I thought, why. She's 77, she's well, she travels, she's having a good time. Like my father said, you're gonna be dead a long time. So enjoy yourself, have a good time.

VLA35 So how do you envision the next twenty, thirty years?

AK35 Let's be back here in twenty years.

VLA36 Yes, let's, please God

DN6 I don't. I simply don't. I just... I guess I'm living for the next day or the next week or the next month and that's it and...

VLA37 You put one foot in front of the other.

DN7 Yah. I mean if I will start thinking about it, I probably would stop playing soccer and I probably would stop climbing up the ladder to do the cutters.

AK36 Or you might be thinking, how do I prolong my ability to do that.

DN8 But really I just don't. I just live day by day and having or whatever it is. And I'm not doing it consciously. I think that's the way my parents lived because they never talked about the future that much. Well I wouldn't say that completely. They do talk about the future so I try to save for the future and I try to do all of

those things so I wouldn't have to suddenly, when the time will come when I'm not going to work anymore, I'll have enough financial resources so I don't have to worry about it. But day to day, physically I just... unless it will change.

AK37 You don't stop doing things just because you think chronologically you should.

DN9 Yes, you're right.

RM10 I think I have a hard time seeing myself in thirty years playing singles tennis, but I have an even more difficult time saying where between now and then I will make that change and it's a little bit of, yeah I'll keep going till I keep going till I keep going and eventually I'll only be playing doubles because then maybe by the time I'm ninety-five, I'll stop playing doubles. But I'll deal with that.

SN9 There's a guy who's 80-something and he still plays soccer.

AK38 There's a woman in her 90s who just ran the marathon.

VLA38 Look at Betty White

DN10 The one of Golden Girls. She's an inspiration because I heard an interview with her and she's 80 or 90 and she's just insane.

VLA39 She has a way of making off-colored jokes, but still age appropriate. How does she do that?

AK39 Cause she comes from a position of experience and wisdom.

VLA40 And humor.

AK40 She's a treasure.

VLA41 So who else inspires you in a similar way?

SN10 My parents

VLA42 I think whether they're here or not. It sounds like we're all inspired by our parents.

SK31 My father inspired in many ways more than my mother. My mother was very content to just be. She was very much an isolate which my father really wasn't,

but he sort of humored her. When she was gone I think as much as he missed, and he did, he started to realize that he looked at the calendar, and I only have a certain number of pages left folks, and I'm gonna make them count. And at her year's death he went to Israel. He was 88 almost 89 years old. He went with a group for two weeks. And he said to me, are you hurt that I'm gonna be away for mom's yartzeit. Would the yartzeit of her death be any more meaningful to you if you were alone in the apartment? Vs seeing the wailing wall and doing all the things you wanted to do. He said no and then he came home and he went right into the hospital and had bypass surgery.

AK41 Tell the rest of the story. When he came home he was talking about his next trip was China as he's coming out of the anesthesia he couldn't talk straight. I'm going to China. That was his determination.

VLA43Did he go?

SK32 No, he didn't make it. But maybe he did – I don't know.

AK42 I would say that her father inspired me and my father gave me a negative example because my father kept running. He was really like he was running away from age to the point that he didn't care who he trampled on or who he hurt. Whereas her father showed that it could be done, you could age and remain active and still be a mensch.

SK33 My father had his casino pishke. He and his lady friend would go to the casinos and they would, they had a budget. But whatever their winnings were went into the pishke so that they went. And when my father died, she said to me you know there's about \$50 left in the pishke. And I said, use it and have a good time. Make believe he's with you because she wanted to give me half of it and I said, don't be ridiculous. Go back to the casino and gamble it and make believe he was there. And he went on a cruise with her and did a lot of things that my mother didn't want to do and it taught me a lesson. Enjoy yourself, make every day count, enjoy it because every day is a gift.

AK43 Whereas my father, when my mother couldn't keep up with him, was perfectly happy to leave her behind because he was like a drowning man. He would do anything to keep himself in his mind young.

VLA44Like what?

AK44 Continuing to work, beyond... he was 85 and I was having lunch with him. And he said, I gotta tell you something. I think my time is coming. I'm afraid he's gonna tell me he's got cancer. And he said, I think I'm gonna retire. My mother was seriously ill, heart problems that happened while they were up here visiting. He left her here with us and went back to Florida to do whatever business he had. And then when an emergency arose, he took great pains to say the length that he went to get on a plane to get back.

SK34 He tried to play the hero.

VLA45 So who inspires you Ray?

RM11 I think obviously my parents. And I think for a combination of sort of the balanced view of being fortunate enough to be able to live long, to be fairly healthy to a fairly old age, being physically and mentally active. But then also having a sense of humor which I think is probably... if I had to say the one thing that is the defining definition of somebody in my mind who is old, regardless of their age, it's not having a sense of humor. And then other people who inspire me... I finally realize that ... RB King, what a cool guy. And then I realize that twenty years later I realize that yeah, he was ok, he was average. And I stop looking at individuals who would inspire and just look at different pieces of multiple people and say that trait, that activity, that attitude inspires me. And will try and pull all of that in.

VLA46 What are some of those?

RM12 The ones that are repeatable. Physical exertiveness, mental toughness, a lot of tenacity kind of stuff, compassion. The traits that we all say, ok if you had a piece of clay and you could make the perfect person, what would you make it to be. And again, getting into the issue about, what do you do to stay young, it's... to me the vision is all of those individual traits and characteristics are branches on a bush. And as people get old, they start to get woody and more shoots come out, but when you look at the bush, it's kind of leggy and woody, inflexible, and there's air in the bottom as opposed to it's just a bush that continues to regenerate, its lush. And that I think is, yeah I'm starting to see that when I deal with some young kids in high school, my sense of humor doesn't quite cut it because they have no idea what I'm talking about. OK so trim the branch and make a little more relevant and less brown and woody and more green and applicable to them. It's just analogy.

VLA47 It's a beautiful analogy

RM13 It's a visual, but...

AK45 Talking about Bush, how about President Bush jumping out of a plane at his age.

VLA48 As you're talking, I'm thinking about... it brings up images for me as well. Talk about sense of humor and it came up for me as well before you stated the essence of the sense of humor. And my father was... it was very near the end of his life. He died of heart disease. And he was 72. And he was in the hospital and they needed to draw blood and there was nothing left in here [points to arm] so they drew from here [points to crotch] a vein here. And he looked up and he said, do you want to make a fist with my foot?

RM14 Wow

VLA49 Yeah, that's my daddy!

AK46 I also think about in the future trying to use whatever I've learned. Whenever I speak to a group, I say, look, I sound really smart because I'm up here giving you advice, but I'm just here telling you all the mistakes I've made. How to use your experience and whatever wisdom you've gained from it, to benefit not just yourself, but to benefit others, to give that piece of advice.

VLA50 Who inspires you, DN?

DN11 I imagine both my parents. I mean my mom had the appetite for life that I... She was amazing. I mean she... If she wanted to go to... We lived in Akko, in the north part of the country on the coast. I mean if she wanted to go to Tel Aviv, she used to go... my brother was part of the cooperative Egged, the bus company. So he gave my parents free tickets for life. My mother would just go to the bus, go on two hours ride to Tel Aviv, get off at the central bus station in Tel Aviv, go to her favorite bagel place, get some bagel, and just come to the next bus and come home.

AK47 Had she done that all of her life?

DN12 All of her life.

AK48 So she's just like you. She kept doing what she does.

DN13 She kept doing that. And my father never liked to do that so he never joined her. But on the other hand, my father... My mom died and my father got cancer and he became paralyzed. I mean he rode his bicycle until he was almost 84. And then he became from riding a bicycle to a wheelchair. But then everyday he insisted on going to the senior citizen center. And he did. The person we hired, the Filipino guy took him there from 8:00 to 12:00. He ate lunch there, he flirted with all the women who worked there and that's what he did. But another part of me that I really look up to is really SN's parents. And I'm telling you I don't think that when I was 40, 50, or 60 I had the social life as much as they have now. I mean it's unbelievable. They live right across from Lincoln Center so you have to understand that... I mean yesterday SN's mother... Saturday, she made a boo boo. Tell them.

SN11 She double booked... I mean she got tickets for something and it was on the same day so they went to a show in the morning and went to another show in the evening which is a lot for them to do, but they did it. And then they left this morning to go with their book group to Nantucket for a four days.

DN14 They just keep doing what they love to do. I mean I'm sure that they are aware of the fact that as SN said before, their time is really limited in this world.

SN12 And now they sold their Cape Cod house so now they're spending the whole summer in the city. So they're doing international tour by going to different restaurants from different countries. They went over to Lincoln Center where there's like a waterfall and seats and tables. And they brought their books and they read and they said, it was like being at the beach.

AK49 The heck with finding younger friends, I want to be friends with them.

SN13 They're pretty cool parents.

DN15 To have in-laws like that, I'm very blessed. I'm very blessed.

Appendix I: Focus Group 5 July 28, 2014

FG, AK, SK, KM

VLA1 Once again, I'm delighted that you're here and at the end of the last session I asked you to think about sacred aging. I didn't define it. I just threw it out there. You [FG and KM] of course weren't here. But I want to read something to you

that we read every Rosh Hashanah morning and every Yom Kippur Morning. It's the Unetaneh Tokef.

On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed, who shall live and who shall die. The text goes on to describe in grave and graphic detail all of the possibilities of what may unfold for each of us in the year to come.

How many shall pass on and how many shall come to be?
Who shall live and who shall die?
Who shall see ripe age and who shall not?
Who shall perish by fire and who by water?
Who by sword and who by beast?
Who by hunger and who by thirst?
Who by earthquake and who by plague?
Who by strangling and who by stoning?
Who shall be secure and who shall be driven?
Who shall be tranquil and who shall be troubled?
Who shall be poor and who shall be rich?
Who shall be humbled and who exalted?
But repentance, prayer and charity temper judgment's severe decree.

We read this every Rosh Hashanah Morning and every Yom Kippur Morning and we're considering what's going to happen from this day to this day next year. And every year as we hear it as we grow older, we add another year to our lives. We don't know what happens in between. Each one comes into the sanctuary carrying their burdens and their jubilations. Every soul that walks into a synagogue anywhere in the world considers these words. On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed, who shall live and who shall die. Who shall see ripe age and who shall not, who shall be tranquil and who troubled. But repentance, prayer and charity temper judgment's severe decree.

Now before you respond, I just want to read something from this book that Richard Address wrote, *Seekers of Meaning* and he's created a movement around sacred aging, specifically directed at boomers. And in the prayer we say that repentance, prayer and charity temper judgment's severe decree. And last time we talked about some of the things that we all do to stay young and to avert the ultimate which is awaiting all of us – healthy living, activities, counseling, medical miracles. And so here he writes about that, "Medical technology and awareness of healthy lifestyles have allowed us to be on our way to elderhostels, cruises, continuing education venues, and, oftentimes back to work, while in

many cases dealing with chronic illness and conditions that would have limited the life and mobility of previous generations. (p5). This boomer generation has these medical technologies, awareness of healthy lifestyle that allows us to be vibrant and rethink our lives. And from ancient times we have “But repentance, prayer and charity temper judgment’s severe decree.” I put that out there I await your response.

AK1 I looked up sacred aging and it says that currently 1/5 of the American population is over 65. And with the fastest growth component being those over 75, they represent the longest living, healthiest most educated, mobile and spiritually educated, engaged generation of older adults that has ever lived.

KM1 In the United States?

AK2 Yah.

SK1 Well, I’ve always looked at that passage metaphorically. When I first read it as a kid, I was thinking that there’s really somebody with this big massive ledger going, who shall live, who shall die, who shall be rich. And as I got older I said, no this is a metaphorical expression because I don’t believe that somebody... I believe in God, but I don’t believe He’s gonna have this and decide that my fate... I don’t... what my fate is, but I don’t believe that it’s one person’s decision. There’s also a piece of our generation that is looking at the clock and pushing that hand... standing with this clock, pushing the hands, back, back – Like the opera we saw Pushing that clock, pushing that clock.

VLA2 What was the opera?

SK2 It was La Traviata.

AK3 It was the worst production we ever saw.

SK3 But, the whole idea is that she kept looking at the clock. The clock...

AK4 But she was already terminally ill.

SK4 She knew it. But I looked at that clock and thought, how many... really part of my generation takes... we do a lot to push that clock back.

VLA3 What do we do? Like some of the things we spoke about last week.

SK5 Well I think first of all, I think this generation has the greatest number of non-theatrical face-lifts imaginable. I think plastic surgery is much bigger specialty in this time than it was in my mother's time. It was always... if you were in the theatre, you would...

AK5 But it's not just face-lifts.

SK6 No, it's enhancements, reductions, get rid of the belly. It's all plastic surgery, I think is a huge part of our generation, which is a part of taking those hands of the clock.

VLA4 So what do you think about that?

SK7 Think about what?

VLA5 The use of plastic surgery to hold back the hands of time.

KM2 I never even looked at it that way. I looked at it more... I want to be attractive to my generation or the older or younger, the younger, actually.

AK6 But we equate being attractive with looking younger.

SK8 With youth.

KM3 Yah, but it's more like if I don't do anything with this face, no man is gonna look at me who is 40, that kind of thing. Not like I want to younger. I just want to look more attractive.

VLA6 But what's the definition of attractive? You kept saying to a man of 40.

KM4 I'm just saying...

VLA7 What you're saying is very real, but what you're... What makes somebody attractive?

KM5 Obviously I guess in that generation it's a person's physical appearance.

VLA8 What about the physical appearance? What's that face-lift do?

KM6 Yah, it makes you look younger. But it's... We went to the club last night. My mother... my mother-in-law belongs. I call her my mother because she's really wonderful. She is an incredible person. 87 years old, has everything going in her head. She's really just great. Anyway, so we were sitting at this table and behind us mom said the woman behind you is 101 years-old. Go and look at her. I got up because it was a buffet, I walked over and so she couldn't see that I was staring at her. I did look and she looked younger than my mom. And it's due to... 101 and her daughter was sitting next to her who I don't know how old she is.

SK9 80 I bet.

KM7 So I was really shocked but I didn't think of... because she... she's not going to attract somebody her age. She's... I'm not sure what I want to say here. It's how you feel, too. So the way... if it makes you feel younger, or it makes you feel more attractive with a face-lift, then it's just because maybe, you feel pressured that you should look that way.

SK10 That's my concern. The pressure is the face can change, but the heart doesn't and if it's only the face that's going to attract somebody else, then the person that is attracted to that face is superficial. That they're not particularly interest in beyond the face. Where do you stop, the face, the hips, the belly, the this, the that? Do you totally reconstruct yourself?

AK7 We all remember Ann Landers and Dear Abby. And there was just one sentence from one of her pieces that I remember reading years ago. A man was a plastic surgeon and it was about the subject of having his wife have plastic surgery. And I remember this sentence. He said, to me, my wife's birth scarred body is the most beautiful in the world.

SK11 I read an article the other day. It was online. It was a woman who was in her 50s. She was a journalist, a widow. She started to date again, met a men a few years younger, and went away for the weekend. She thought this was gonna be a wonderful weekend. She realized that what she expected didn't happen. The intimacy didn't happen. And he said to her, I had to keep looking away. You were a disappointment. Maybe you should try to do something with yourself. And she said I'm going to, I'm gonna hang up on you. I'm going to move on. You wanted to go away with me on a weekend, but I was a disappointment to you. In other words, my body was a disappointment, but not my mind. That's who I am. This is just a vessel. This is not who I am.

- AK8 Think back to when your father started going out with Evelyn.
- SK12 A woman who he really did love, other than my mother. And he said to me before I met her, he said, I need to warn you. She's very wrinkled.
- VLA9 So what do we think about all of that in terms of sacred aging and what's the goal, without judgment.
- FG1 Weren't you really searching for a different topic. More of a health issue vs vanity? Because plastic surgery doesn't do anything for your health. Taking care of yourself physically does. Most plastic surgery really is a person's wanting to be attractive, feeling accepted by the general population, but it doesn't do anything for that person's health as far as longevity of life.
- AK9 If you think about it, people of all ages have plastic surgery because they want... It's not just older people trying to look young, so I guess part of the issue is societal emphasis, to the exclusion of really important things, or a person's looks. Because you see young people doing it also. And we even have TV shows about it.
- SK13 The interesting thing, what you say is true and I've read people who have jeopardized their own personal health to have plastic surgery. A famous one is Tooti Fields who was diabetic, she never told her doctor she was diabetic. She had a face-lift, she went into diabetic shock and died.
- VLA10I would ask and this is an important conversation because plastic surgery is one of the ways we have to maintain our youth, to hold back the clock, to be attractive to younger people, to... whatever it is. But we're talking out there somewhere. Let's make it very personal. Let's respond to this text from a very personal point of view, and the notion of sacred aging and what does that mean, and how that notion affects you. We haven't defined it purposefully. It's what you define it as. We can talk about what that means to you or we can simply just let it be an idea that we're all kind of talking around. That's ok too. But let's consider it from a personal point of view.
- AK10 It's an interesting question that you ask, because the little bit of literature that I was able to read is more about programming in the synagogue than from the individual's perspective.

VLA11 Well, programming in the synagogue to respond to each person's personal story and commonalities of those stories so that we can create programming that addresses the very issues that affect boomers in a meaningful way. So that people can find what they need in the synagogue.

AK11 Well, I can tell you some very personal perspective. I am concerned that as I age I'm gonna have a harder time attracting and retaining clients. But it's been easy thus far.

VLA12 Is that beginning to... Is that already happening? Or it's a worry?

AK12 It's more a worry and I tell myself that in my particular specialty a little gray hair can be an advantage.

FG2 What is your specialty?

AK13 Succession and exit planning for business owners. I can talk to business owners in a way that I might not have been able to do when I was 40.

VLA13 Give an example of how it's different now from when you were 40.

AK14 I think I can be because I'm closer in age, I can ask, have you thought about when you want to transition out of your business? Have you thought about who you want to... they'll accept those questions coming from me better than they might have if I asked them as a 40-year-old. I think they see me as asking it out of empathy, not out of what kind of tax can I use. How can I apply my technical genius to your problem.

VLA14 So your questions are the same and you're the same, but their perception of you is different?

AK15 Let's also talk about the other side of it. I also feel some advantages that I'm better because I've just been around longer. When I speak, I always tell the audience, this sounds like sage advice, but I'm really just repeating all of the mistakes I've made. But you live a little bit longer and you study what you're worth, I'm sure you're a better clergy for all the years of experience you've had.

VLA15 So when you talk about being able to offer sage advice at the point at which people are transitioning at a very important time in their lives, is that not sacred work?

AK16 I view it that way. In fact, I often refer to it as God's work.

VLA16 So what do you advise people to help them approach what for some can be very challenging to let go and acknowledge that I'm at an age when I need to do this. That's a major step, right? To simply be at the place in your life where you are able to accept the fact that I've reached a stage that's more twilight than development. So what kinds of things do you offer to help them get through this sacred time?

AK17 Most important thing is I try to give them piece of mind by telling them, look we're gonna take this step by step and I'm gonna give you an actual road map. You will know at any given moment where we are and where we have to go. You're gonna be in complete control. Because I think so many business owners are afraid that once they let this out of the bag, they've opened a Pandora's box and they can't shut it.

VLA17 What's in Pandora's box?

AK18 Mistakes that they may have made in running the business, family issues if they have children in the business, or if they have one child in the business and one child not in the business. All of these issues that sick people like me study, they... to them, they're scared to death. The pressure they may be getting from their spouse, gee if we give him the company, what are we gonna give our other son if they're not in the business. How much are we gonna make him pay for it? Just issue after issue. And I think learning to be a good listener is important and I'm also doing what I can to study the psychology of it.

SK14 Also I would add that people's perception of when they are ready, changed over the past five years. The recession, 2008... people said I've got enough money to retire, this money is gonna last me until I'm 101. But the recession took the starch out of a lot of people. They're looking at this and saying, maybe I really need to work longer.

AK19 But it's also becoming more challenging because as the baby boomers want to leave their business, there are a lot more businesses for sale so people are a lot more selective. Economic conditions are just not gonna go back to where they were. So there are just so many... The way I describe it is, you heard during the Viet Nam War incoming mortars coming in from every direction.

SK15 When my father retired, he was just about my age that I am now, 65. When he retired the interest rate was 18%. So whatever investments he made, were developing at 19%. But as time passed away, he said I might as well put my money under my bed. I'm not gonna keep it in the bank anymore, not as less than 1%. And one of the last conversations he had with me was it was a lot easier for me to decide to retire than it was for you. And it's true.

VLA18... for all the reasons that you described and that we certainly know. So when we approach this text, On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed, who shall live and who shall die, who shall see ripe age and who shall not, who shall be troubled and who tranquil, what's it's a metaphor for?

AK20 It can't mean what it says, literally, because do we mean to say that if I decide to engage in repentance, prayer, and charity a week after Yom Kippur, I missed my ten-day window, it's sealed, there's nothing I can do about it?

SK16 I think it's called a slice of life in that...

AK21 Let me finish. I think it's also saying that we may hold some of that in our own hands. We can live the kind of lives that we want to live or that we should live. And then basically, whatever comes our way physically or economically, we're just gonna be better off.

VLA19The fact is at some point it's gonna be your year to pass on. And at some point it's gonna be your year to die. And who know whether we'll get to ripe age or not, and who knows what will take our lives. But we can determine whether we'll be tranquil or troubled. We can determine whether we'll be humble or exalted. And so what are some of the things that we can do, not to avert the severe decree because nobody does, but to avert the severe decree in the severity maybe.

SK17 I think part of it since I retired... my thoughts are always coming back to how can I make every day count. What can I do to feel that I haven't wasted a day because there's only a finite number left.

AK22 I feel that too.

SK18 It's that feeling that if I'm sitting... I almost feel guilty if I'm sitting around doing nothing although nothing should be sometimes productive because sitting around doing nothing means you're thinking. But there's a great guilt because I've worked for so many years. Sitting around doing nothing feels like, why are you

sitting around doing nothing. But I'm always looking for something else to do. If it's not for myself, it's for somebody else because I feel good when I've done something for somebody. It doesn't have to be big, but it makes me feel good.

VLA20 Karen, what's going on in your head?

KM8 It's actually really interesting to listen to these two. I really like what you were saying about your profession. That's really interesting and listening to you, I don't count every day at all. Sometimes I think OMG this is really not a good day. Thank God tomorrow's a new day, but not that I'm trying to make every day count. Sometimes I feel sorry that it wasn't a good day, but it's not because I want every day to count. I don't think I'm at that... I don't know. As I get older, I think I'll know myself a little better too, which is helpful. And I try to avoid situations where I know I get too emotional. And I want to avoid these situation for the simple reason that I don't want to have a spoiled day or Gary's thinking of me like, Oh my gosh, she's nuts again or things like that. Gary's my husband, really a great guy.

AK23 You don't want your migdola high-jacked as they say.

KM9 I really like that prayer. And realized that it's not whether you die or not this year or next year. It's what you can accomplish before you die in a way. So meaning accomplished, trying to be a good person, trying to listen, trying to not be selfish. But also trying to feel good about myself because if I feel good about myself, things come more into play. If I don't, everything can become overwhelming. But I would never do any face-lift, but I would always color my hair. And would always say I don't mind getting old for the simple reason my kids are getting older too. They have a great life. I hope it will continue this way. One day I really hope to become a grandma. It's so wonderful. So I would love to live and see how that is, experience it myself. But again, I'm always happy when I hear this prayer because I'm here. I didn't die.

VLA21 I think that's true for a lot of people when they hear that, that I wasn't checked off on the ledger list, whatever that means.

AK24 I think it's like many other prayers. Taking it absolutely literally doesn't work. There's a line in responsive where it says, for distorting the facts to fit our own theories. Every time I see that I say, but that's what lawyers are paid to do most of the time. But what that prayer really is telling you is that you have a choice. That

severe decree is gonna happen and you have choice and you have choice about how it's gonna affect you.

VLA22 There was a video a few years ago and I actually showed it on Yom Kippur. It showed modern-day events that were these very things happening. It was so eye opening. It's not some ancient ideas and they showed the fires out west – who by fire, who by water – it was the year of the tsunami.

AK25 Those poor people on the planes.

KM10 It seems like they really had no clue.

SK19 My birthday is September 11th and every year for the past eleven years, the first thing that I do is I stop and say I'm here. And I can say a prayer for those who aren't. It's a very sobering day to have a birthday. It's very sobering, really because you realize that all those people got up that morning. They all got up to go to work, or they all got on a plane. No one can convince me that it was on a ledger. It was in somebody else's hands, but not theirs. So for me whatever is in my hands, I try to make it count because there is so much else that is not in my hands. So I can look at life at 65 as gee, the glass is half empty, but I don't want to. I want to say the glass is half full and I want a drink of it because... We talked the last time what happens when you get... Ray said you really get old when you lose your sense of humor. And I thought about that all the way home. It's true because I think when you start looking at life as dark and maudlin, you're old, you're really old.

AK26 There's another piece of it. Some of the worst things that could happen to any of us are really things that will actually physically happen to someone else. Losing loved ones, things like that. That will put you on a bed of pain.

VLA23 Or to us. You said it's gonna happen to somebody else, but it's gonna happen to us.

AK27 Yeah, but I'm saying it's not something that happened to me. I wasn't in a fire or something like that.

VLA24 You're not relating to these very specifically in other words.

AK28 Well, the bed of pain part certainly. If something happens to a loved one...

SK20 You feel the pain as well, very much so.

VLA25How are you relating to all of this Frank? I saw tears when I was first reading this.

FG3 You have to have a high acceptance of it all that things will happen.

VLA26Can you expand on that?

FG4 Well, when one is young one never thinks of these things. When you get older you start thinking of these things and some people take care of themselves better and I think it's a good idea because it's not just for living longer, but feeling better as your living. But cosmetically taking care of oneself is not really a way to do it. I don't think so. I think it can't hurt, but it's not going to improve one's longevity. I think going to the pool is the best thing. It's healthful.

SK21 It's very relaxing too.

KM11 I just want to mention one thing. In general I totally agree that... we started with doing some sort of surgery that improves your physical well-being can actually be good for you because emotionally if you feel this is who I really am. I'm not... OK I'm 65, but I really feel I'm ten years younger. And now with this face I do look ten years younger so I feel the way I look. That could be good too. I mean I'm just looking at myself. I weigh myself every day. If I am staying a certain weight, it's a great start for me. So ridiculous, but that's what it is.

FG5 But that's not doing anything to yourself like plastic surgery or anything. That's just a physical activity.

KM12 No, I'm not physically active, really, I have to say. I would like to be more, but I just don't have the time.

FG6 Watching your weight is an active...

KM13 Yes, but for example tonight, I cooked, but I wasn't hungry. That's a rarity for me, but because I'm not going to be home. So I wasn't hungry by the time I was done and it didn't look so good so I wasn't gonna try anyway, I know that I can make myself go home, get ready at night and not have dinner at all. And if Gary asks if I had anything to eat, I say sure, sure. And that's fine with him. It makes me feel like great, tomorrow morning when I go on the scale, you can relate to this? It's important to me.

AK29 But now you're doing something for your appearance that could damage your health.

KM14 I don't think so. I'm a healthy person when it comes to food.

AK30 We're all healthy until we're not.

KM15 Skipping a diner is fine. I think there's nothing wrong with it. I had a very good lunch today so that's fine. But all I'm saying is, your physical appearance can actually stabilize you emotionally. If you're emotionally stabilized, I think it helps having a better life, being calmer about things, looking at things maybe in a more positive way. So I think...

FG7 But you're stabilizing by limiting your food intake which in many regards is dieting is good to maintain a proper weight balance, a healthy weight. But if you have cosmetic surgery, it's not gonna do anything for you.

KM16 I agree with... What I'm saying is it does emotionally help you. And I think if you're emotionally happier, that would be a good thing in general.

FG8 That's probably true.

AK31 I'm not passing judgment and saying right or wrong, but I can say I want to look like a healthy 65-year-old man, but it's another thing if I say, I want to look like a 40-year-old man.

KM17 I think it's sad if you think that way.

AK32 No, but that's part of what the plastic surgery is. So how authentic is it. It's fine to want to look your best for who you are.

KM18 Yah, it's just a tough call.

AK33 Yeah, it sure is.

SK22 I caused quite a furor.

KM19 But I still like getting older. I'll probably think about it differently by the time I reach 70 and I notice already some things that are much tougher for me than they were a year ago.

VLA27Like what?

KM20 When I get out of the shower, I bend forward, I crouch down, I bend forward, I brush my hair and then I get up. I never even was thinking this is kind of tough to push my whole body up. All of sudden I feel it in my legs. And I stand on my tip toes to make this more of a workout. That never used to be an issue. Balance is another thing. When I realized I don't have the balance I used to have. When I do rock scrambling, I can go up perfectly fine. Going down all of a sudden becomes an issue because I need to be more stable on my feet. So things like that.

AK34 I have perfect balance. No, it's a problem. It really is.

KM21 Oh really, you think it's with age?

SK23 Oh it does definitely. It's one of the reasons why Berk gives that course in Thai Chi. It's basically for balance and not that many places that give it, but Berk which has a focus on rehabilitation and aging, they do give a class. I think some of the Y's do also. It's focusing on balance and working on your core to keep you in balance. So it's obviously a problem when we get older.

AK35 Oh I find myself tripping and falling a lot more than I ever did.

SK24 I always thought it was due to eye sight or something.

FG9 Do you exercise. Do you walk?

AK36 I do all the machines. I do bicycle and elliptical.

VLA28Aging also creates hearing loss and that can affect your balance. No matter how much you exercise, it helps, everything you do helps, but ultimately we are aging.

AK37 See, but you can exercise in excess, deprive yourself to make yourself look younger. You can exercise appropriately so you can be as healthy as you can be for whoever you are.

VLA29In the book I quoted from last week, she said at one point the goal is not for 90 to be the new 70 or 50 the new 60 or whatever; the goal is to be the best 90 you can be. It's exactly what you're saying. The goal is to be the best 60 or 70 you can be.

AK38 At the end of the day, that's all we can be.

VLA30 That's who we are. But we do live in a world of denial. We live in a culture of denial in regard to ageism. And my personal quest here is to see how we can embrace all that life has to offer. And part of what life has to offer is aging.

SK25 I remember many years ago sitting in on an interview and we were hiring a new teacher for one of the new classes. And the committee was made of teachers, administrators and parents. And a very talented woman came in. She was returning to teaching. I would say she was about 42, 43. To me, she was certainly young. And she gave a wonderful interview. She was warm... you could tell she loved what she was doing. And one of the parents sitting right opposite me said, so tell me Shelley, how many years do you think we'll get out of her? I sat up bolt straight. I said to her, I'm gonna make believe I didn't hear you say that. Well, what's wrong? I want you to think about what you just said. Everybody got quiet. How many years are we gonna get out of her? It's like I'm gonna buy a car and how many miles will I get before I have to trade it in? I was appalled.

AK39 Well, this raises something else. In most careers and professions as you age not even old age, but middle age, you start becoming concerned about being down-sized. Or in your organization it's either up or out.

SK26 Some places it's mandatory.

AK40 But I'm talking about people in the middle of their careers. And there are laws trying to protect them like SK said. Some questions you can't ask and things like that. So it's always on our minds.

SK27 Well when I was at a bar-b-q a few weeks ago, I heard a much younger attorney say, when will the dead wood really leave? And because it was a networking business meeting and most of the people there knew AK, I shut up. And got up and walked away. And if it had been anything else I would have probably held up a mirror and said what are you talking about. You may be 40, but talk about that clock, it ticks really fast, it goes faster than you think, and one day you're gonna be that dead wood.

AK41 The difference between 30 and 60 looks a lot greater when you're 30 than when you're 60.

SK28 Looks longer.

KM22 I just want to say something. I can't multi-task. My kids can't not multi-task. And I can see the huge difference in younger people and what they can get accomplished. And how they feel about using the computer and...

SK29 I think they can get a lot done, but I don't think they can get a lot done in depth.

KM23 I can't judge.

AK42 And because you multi-task, does that mean you're doing them right?

KM24 If I look at my kids, I think they do.

AK43 Then how do we square that with the far eastern writing of "be present at every moment?"

KM25 Well, I think if you live out here in the northeast, New York where life is so much faster, it's probable a little difficult to incorporate that unless you make an effort. My kids went to school in New Orleans. Life is much slower there and people are much nicer and friendlier and actually look you in the eyes when you pass them. So it's totally different. But the young kids still multi-task. I can't be on the phone. My son called yesterday and just wanted to know I'd made the appointment, he's coming home for ten days, and he wanted to know if I'd made the two doctor appointments, minor things. I was just filling out a form and I realized I can fill out the form, but I cannot listen to him at the same time. And I know my kids have no issues with that. Talia can type up her report, being on the phone and having the TV show, reality show of course, she's 23, getting to know what's going on with that too. I know she can. It makes me completely nervous when I have to do two things at the same time. So I don't do them because I don't do them in depth. I don't do them right and so on. So I think they do have quite a bit ahead of us.

VLA31I'm not sure if it's a function of old and young. I think it's just different people because I'm a multi-tasker.

KM26 But you also are an exception in so many ways. I mean look what you accomplished – four boys. To me that's incredible. They all are great kids. You are a cantor. You became a rabbi. You have a PhD. You're getting your second one. You're running a home, a congregation. You are there. To me you are.

VLA32Please take me off the pedestal because I'll only disappoint you.

AK44 Well at the end of the day, are you really doing more than one thing at once.

VLA33 Sometimes yes, but I have many things going at the same time and I actually like jumping to the different things. Some people do that and they don't complete any one of them. I work towards completion.

AK45 The other thing you have to remember is the computer is particularly conducive to looking at or looking your phone or iPad while you're doing something else. But at the end of the day I really wonder if you can give all of those tasks the right attention. You may make judgments this is not so important that I really hear this that carefully so I can be reading the Times at the same time.

VLA34 If I'm on the phone I walk away from the computer so I can be fully present for the person I'm talking to. I know I need to do that – we all do.

KM27 But even if there's a noise level around, I have a hard time focusing. And I remember when I was in college – that's part of aging – I would go to a café where it was noisy just so I could concentrate and study.

SK30 But it was a constant level of noise. I can relate to that. I could take a book and go to the student center where there was a constant din and I could read. But if I sat in a quiet room and somebody whispered outside of my door, my ears went straight to the whispering outside the door. So I think it's the punctuation of the sound rather than the constant sound. There's noise in an airport or a railroad station, I can read. But in a silent room, it has to be silent. Because if the TV is on or he's on the phone, I have to get up and leave because I end up reading the same line three times. I don't know if that's aging.

VLA35 I can't teach in a noisy classroom. Some people can, but I can't teach in a noisy classroom. I need everybody to be focused on the same thing at the same time with no distractions because I think that how learning takes place. And some teachers can teach with all kinds of stuff going on and they thrive on that.

AK46 That lady we met at the bar-b-q Saturday night was talking about how distracting it was at Weinbrook High School to have the open classrooms.

SK31 1973 the high school was open. This was 15 to 18-year-olds. And it was originally built as a totally open classroom with sections for bio and sections for English and

ultimately they had to put walls up. Because if you had ADD kids, they were in the English class and they were listening to biology.

AK47 So let me ask you a question. If Jonathan was able to listen to somebody and do something else at the same time, how come he couldn't listen to us when we were the only thing he had to listen to?

SK32 Because we didn't pay him. He wasn't getting a salary from us. He didn't have to support a wife and a child. Things happen with maturity.

VLA36Do you think you'll hear these words differently this year from how you heard them last year? Or did you ever make note that you heard them differently from previous years? Did that ever happen for you?

AK48 I think I took them very literally and would say well, this can't mean that. God's not gonna throw me into a fire if I repent a week afterwards.

SK33 I think for me this is the first year I'm gonna be saying Yizkor for my dad, those words are gonna be hard. Seven years ago when I lost my mother, those words were hard. The other part is, one day someone's gonna have say that about me.

VLA37Do you think about that more as you age?

SK34 Yeah. I said at the end of the other night, my birthday's on the 11th and it's a milestone birthday and the only thing I want... I don't want any jewelry, I don't want any chatzkes; I just want to be with my family. That's all. And to do that means that we have to travel out to St. Louis. That's just the way it is. Our son and his family are there and I asked my daughter do you want to join us and she said, it's your birthday. I look at it as that is my greatest gift. To be able to say I'm 65 and I have my children and I have my health and I'm actually in better shape at 65 than I was at 60. So to me, that's the glass half full. But I do know that, like I said, to go back to the original statement, I know that one day one of my children will have to think of those words about me or both of us.

AK49 And what I think about in that vein is what do I want them to be thinking and saying about me.

VLA38That's an excellent question and one that I have in the back of my head.

AK50 Sometimes I envision what would I want written on my tombstone and usually *menschkup* is all.

SK35 I had thought about that when I had to do the inscription of my father's faceplate on the tombstone. And some of what defined him, I made sure was on there, and he was a radio amateur. And in the radio amateur world when radio amateur dies, it's called the silent key because when they first got their licenses, they had to know Morse code. So whenever he used to refer to a friend who was a radio amateur who died, he would say it's a silent key. So, on his inscription it is beloved husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather, silent key. And I gave his call numbers because that is part of who defined him. And if anybody sees it, they'll know who he really was on so many different levels. But it also reminds me when I sat with the rabbi when my mother died and when my father died... it was the same rabbi... one of his biggest questions was, how do you remember your mother? How do you remember your father? And that question sometimes reverberates in my head because one day my children are gonna be asked the same question. And I would hope that they said, generous and loving and considerate, unselfish. It's what I try to be. And that's I would want other people to remember me that way.

AK51 Isn't that one of the advantages of aging because you really do start to think about your legacy? What do you really want it to be?

KM28 Yah, I hadn't thought about that.

VLA39I think there's a big difference between 50-something and 60-something.

KM29 It's ten years.

VLA You're a young boomer. And that's come up a few times where you say, I've never thought about that. I think it's that ten year difference. That's not a bad thing. It's just a reality.

AK52 There's a difference between 60-someething and 70-something.

VLA40I think each decade has its stuff, has its reality.

SK36 Well, further into my career as a teacher, every year I'd get the assignment sitting down with the newer teachers came in and talk to them about their pension plan. And they would look at me, 22, 23, like what are you talking about? And I said all

I want you to realize, can you snap your finger? And she'd say yeah. That's how long it takes before you realize that you're ready think about retirement. That little snap and all of a sudden you look around and go, Oh I'm in my 50s. I'm in my 60s. So you may not think it's important for me to talk to you about it now, it really is because I really wish that somebody had made me focus on it when I was that age. I really didn't focus on it till I was almost 40. And I always felt like I was doing a mitzvah by sitting a young teacher down and saying, take care of this stuff. And take care of it so you can forget it for a while, but know that it's taken care of. But I felt like I was doing them a service and making them reflect on it's not all about you because sometimes there's a bigger world out there. And sometimes the younger people, it's all about them.

AK53 I think another key piece in the aging process is learning to accept your failures, missed opportunities, places where you may not have done as well as you'd hoped to in life, and try to build on whatever you have to make the rest of it meaningful.

SK37 There was a wonderful comedian, George Burns. His famous line was, I get up in the morning, I look in the newspaper, I turn to the obituaries, my name is not in it, I get up and have breakfast. And he lived to late nineties?

VLA41Did he ever get to 100?

AK54 I don't think he quite made it [he did January 20, 1896 – March 9, 1996]

SK38 But he had the best philosophy. My name's not in the obits, get up and have breakfast.

VLA42I'm gonna close with. On Yom Kippur Morning we read from the Book of Deuteronomy. And we read the following: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that I have set before you life or death, blessing or curse; choose life, therefore, that you and your descendants may live – by loving your God, listening to God's voice, and holding fast to the One who is your life and the length of your days. [read again] Choose life therefore that you and your descendants may live. I want you to think about what that means between now and next week. What does it mean to choose life? What does it mean, not only in the grand scheme of things, but what does it mean for you personally to choose life? What times have there been in your life when the path could take down this road or that road? I'm not going to define those roads. One thing I've observed in my many years is that we don't learn to choose life until we're truly confronted with death, the death of a loved one, the illness of a loved one, our own personal

illness. And so we don't... humans are built not to necessarily understand what it means to choose life until we're confronted, truly confronted, with death. And I would love to find a way so that we could learn to choose life without having to feel the pain of being confronted with death. I don't know if it's possible. I believe that's a gift that I've always had even before I was confronted with death on way too many occasions. But I don't think my approach to life and death changed. I don't think it did. I think I was the same person through that, through those experiences. I don't know why. I just know that's my truth. And I would love to be able to share that in a way that people can embrace life and the joys of life and the challenges of life and the darkness of life and the light of life without having to go through darkness. I don't know if it's possible.

SK39 Do you think it's partly the way we're raised, the atmosphere in which we're raised?

VLA43I think it's partly the culture of denial.

AK56 To try to protect young people from death and from seeing...

VLA44Death is a part of life from seeing... Death is a punishment, and death is to be averted in every way instead of focusing on celebrating life. But I think until we can truly, truly confront our own mortality, so we get that out of the way. That's a truth, I'm gonna die. And there's nothing I can do about that, nothing. But I can do something about how I live.

AK57 Yeah, we can do plastic surgery and look as young as we want, but we're not gonna fool the grim reaper.

VLA45No, we're not. And the wrinkles right around there and the fingers give it all away anyway.

FG10 Some religions help with having an open wake with the body right there, have in a sense a greater acceptance of death than our Jewish religion. In the Jewish religion, buried so fast, closed casket for whatever reason, closed, be done with it the next day. Whereas, I've gone to many wakes where everybody's very festive and the person who died is right out there. And they'll walk up and say a prayer.

AK58 Hey, he looks terrific. Never looked so good.

VLA46What do you think?

FG11 Well, I think there's greater acceptance in that religion where the body is right there and families are right there and children are right there. And they're observing death and as they mature and grow up, it's part of their life.

VLA47 There's a significant difference. They feel that person is going on to a better life, that there's an absolute sense of an afterlife in a very physical, very real manner. Whereas, in Judaism, when you're dead, you're dead. And I think that notion of an afterlife is part of the denial. That's what I think.

KM30 Because of your religion. That's why you think it.

VLA48 No, my religion gives me a framework in which to bury our dead and to confront death and so on.

KM31 I meant in your religion, in our religion, you die, you're dead. I know in the Catholic religion, death is bad. It has to do with the devil. And so on. But once you die, it is being... the physical death, but actually you are going to live with God.

VLA49 Yes, you're going to be reunited with God and you're going to be reunited with your loved ones who have gone. And there's a whole other that is very much part of the belief system. And I believe that in a way, that's a denial of death.

AK59 And with us, it's just that's all she wrote?

SK40 It's like death is sort of a weigh station. I'll see them again. It may be a while, but I don't know if it's denial or if it's just a way of feeling that it's not the end of the road, that there's gonna be another road somewhere. I had a neighbor that I adored her and she went through two very big tragedies. She lost a son at 18 and her husband died very young before that. And this was a woman that she always had a smile on her face, she was always pleasant. When you think about what she had lived through, she could be bitter and miserable and just the worst neighbor possible. And I once said to her, what gives the strength? And she said because I know they're waiting for me. I couldn't argue with that. If that belief gives her the strength to put one foot after the other, hey.

AK60 They actually believe in the equivalent of another actual world? So if I were to see my father-in-law, is he with my mother-in-law? How old is he? All of those things.

SK41 Does he look exactly like he did when he left? Or does he look like he did when he carried me at 18 months?

AK61 Is he the man that I detested when I first knew SK? Or is he the man that I loved in later life?

SK42 You're different than when he met you, too.

AK62 Absolutely, but don't we believe that our spirits live on in some...?

VLA50The most concrete idea that we have is that we live on through our progeny, through their memories of us, and through their talking about us, and keeping us alive in their lives. That's the most concrete... there is a notion of an *olam haba*, a world to come, but we don't define it, we don't know what it looks like. We don't have this notion of... and nobody no matter what their religion is really knows. Religion I believe is a framework to help us navigate the mysteries of life. And it's not to say that one is a better way than another. I just believe that whether you believe in an afterlife or don't believe in an afterlife... as my father used to say, when you're dead, you're dead. It made sense because he was a person who lived THIS life. And that was his point. He lost a daughter to cancer and he lost a wife and he still had this incredible joy in the here and now. And that's what makes sense to me. And how do you do that in a culture that denies death so that you do everything to avert it. So you spend all your energy on averting death instead of living.

AK63 Do you think your dad had any belief in some way, whether it be spiritual, that he would be reunited with your mom and your sister?

VLA51I don't know. That wasn't the point. I certainly would love to think that's a possibility, but nobody knows.

SK43 Nobody comes back and tells us.

VLA52We can only keep them alive in our heart and in our words and in our memories. That's all we have in the here and now. And I'm ok with that. Would I give anything for a nano-second with them?

SK44 Look how many people deal with mediums and tarot cards. I have a friend who said, do you want to go with me to see a medium and I said no, because I'm a large... [laughter]

AK64 The funniest thing she ever said, when my parents were approaching their 50th anniversary, we were talking about having a party. Well, whose gonna come? All their friends are gone. SK suggested a séance.

VLA53 You know when you get the spots in your eyes – spotters. Nobody tells you some of the stuff. I figured, Hi Mom. Not really.

KM32 Can I just tell a little story? When my kids went to school, there was a little girl, she must have been two maybe three at the most. And the parents were from the Netherlands. And one of the teachers was very close with the family or with the mother and had a whole support system bringing in food and taking care of the baby and all that. Anyway, it was pretty clear that the little girl wouldn't be able to survive. And they went back to the Netherlands because there was one more chance that it was possible in Europe. And it worked for a few more weeks and then she died. So the teacher told me that she went over to the Netherlands the day she heard that the little girl had died and the mother was so upset. And she said would it help you if I come. She said yes. So she came very early in the morning, went to her hotel, and then in the afternoon went over to the house. She said that it was such a shock to see that little girl in the living room in the corner of the sofa sitting there. She was dead.

VLA54 Oh my.

AK65 I just read an article in the Times that I showed to SK. In New Orleans there is this move towards posing bodies as they were in life. So there's a picture of a lady sitting at the table with her sunglasses on with a glass of beer except she's dead.

VLA55 That's what they did with this little girl.

KM33 But the whole family came around... They would sit next to her. They would touch her. She was wrapped in something for whatever reason. She said it was such a shock for her, she could not go over the threshold. She just couldn't. It was such a shock and she felt like if she could have been prepared maybe she would have been able to deal with it. But then an hour later, she saw one of the cousins... The little girl had a baby sister, so she saw one of the cousins running

back and forth, throwing toys around in the living room with the little girl sitting there.

FG12 You're not talking about a replica –

KM34 No, they posed the body and they did this for a day or two. And she told me that in Southern Italy they used to put the person on the kitchen table because everybody would always come into the kitchen, and the kids were asked to bite a toe of the dead person to show them, don't be fearful. Nothing will happen, this is normal, this is what you can expect because the worst is the fear, once you overcome that...

VLA56 That's the polar opposite of closing the casket and doing it quickly and even more so than the wake. In Buenos Aires you have the above ground mausoleums that look like beautiful houses, each one's different. And in some you have the families posed, preserved in some way, if I remember correctly. The houses are beautiful and are an extension of how the people lived.

KM35 In Germany too... It's for the whole family and either they get cremated and you have the urn in there or they actually have the person in there. I'm not sure how that works actually.

FG13 Like a stuffed animal? How can they preserve a person that way? How long can formaldehyde last?

AK66 Ask Lenin and Stalin... they were on display for years. When the union dissolved they were verboten, but they were on display for many, many years. You could go to their tomb, right?

FG14 Enclosed in glass or something? Formaldehyde?

AK67 I don't know how they did it.

KM36 The Egyptians would take everything out, the brains, the organs, and basically the shell would stay and that's how they preserved them. So I think there is a way...

SK45 They were also wrapped.

KM37 I don't know... I feel like when I'm dead, I want to be dead. I don't want to be preserved in any way.

FG15 Jewish people don't go for cremation.

VLA57But it's done more and more. Traditionally you're not supposed to in any way desecrate the body. For some people in more modern times, it's too close to the Holocaust with burning bodies. But more and more people in Conservative as well as Reform Judaism are choosing cremation because it's better for the environment and doesn't take up space and ...

AK68 [looking at iPhone] Now here you go, a photographic guide to the world's embalmed leaders... Pictures of them.

SK46 It's nothing I really want to remember before I go to sleep at night.

VLA58Yes, sweet dreams, all. We'll all be able to picture the little girl right there.

KM38 I mean it was a natural thing.

VLA59Yes, it's not laughable

KM39 For us to hear this and actually to be in the same room, it must be very unusual, just not something that you can understand.

SK47 But it also... talk about the word denial. If you have this diseased child all dressed up sitting in the parlor, you're denying that she's dead.

AK69 Or you're saying this is the way I remember her.

SK48 You're really denying that this child is gone.

FG16 It's certainly stronger than a photograph.

VLA60It could go either way. I pictured it differently, but what you're saying is what I said to Frank before, that we accept that when you're dead, you're dead, we close the casket, we bury the body, it's done. And there are not only prescribed laws about how you mourn, but there are prescribed laws about how you get up from mourning. Literally get up from mourning, after a very specific prescribed time. Now this you could think of either way – that you're denying it by having her be so real, but on the other hand you're also looking at it square in the face. This is how I heard it.

KM40 That's how I... I think that's the idea behind it.

VLA61 She's not gonna get up from that seat.

AK70 And you have the opportunity to say goodbye.

KM41 I think that's the whole idea

VLA62 I think that's the cultural message. It really sends it home.

FG17 Much different than a photograph.

KM42 Well, you're physically there. The photograph is something... I can't watch Criminal Minds. I can't watch this. That will always follow me because it is just so realistic. But I can look at a photograph and still go to sleep. It's kind of different. Even though that's TV and...

Appendix J: Focus Group 6 August 4, 2014

AK, SK, RM, KM, DN, SN

VLA1 So here's my hypothesis. The study is "baby boomers confronting their own mortality, a comparison of those whose parents are living and those whose parents have died." And my hypothesis is that "baby boomers whose parents have died are more aware of, informed about their own mortality than those whose parents are still living. And this impacts the degree to which they embrace the blessings of life.

RM1 I agree with everything in the sentence. Is the word "baby boomers" necessary? In other words, does it suggest that baby boomers act like this while the prior generation didn't?

VLA2 That's a great question. I only said baby boomers because that's the population I'm chose to deal with, to study in order to narrow down the study. So it could be anybody, but the population that I sent the survey to were baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964. I don't know how sociologists came up with those dates. I thought baby boomers was supposed to be those born after WWII when the men came home from war and there was an explosion of moms and dads coming together. 1946 I agree with, but 1964? So I was going to study just early boomers, and then I thought I may not get enough people so I decided to go with all boomer and see what I get.

So my study is specifically about this population. So my hypothesis to the topic of baby boomers confronting their own mortality comparing those whose parents are living and those whose parents have died – my hypothesis is that baby boomers whose parents have died are more aware of, more informed about their own mortality than those whose parents are still living. And this impacts the degree to which they embrace the blessings of life. And we have some of each here which is really perfect.

KM1 I'm not sure if I share that with you all through because I don't know if I'm the youngest baby boomer. I was born in 1961.

SN1 I was born in 1958.

KM2 OK so close. But what I always heard was some of the thoughts come more as you get older and you're a young baby boomer. That was last time when I heard it a couple of times. And I'm very fortunate to have both parents still with me even though I don't have much contact with them, but they're alive. And I think a lot of it does have to do with age. I can only speak for the half that does still have parents. It really might be true for those who have lost their parents. But I personally think that first of all embracing life is so dependent on how you feel about yourself too and how your circumstances are. I have both parents and that's great, but I don't think they have any influence on me, the way I feel about my own mortality or how I feel about every day and value every day.

SK1 It also might be different at the time you lose your parents. AK was significantly younger when his parents died. My mother died six years ago, almost seven years ago. My father died in February. So I was moving toward retirement and I was retired. I had more time to think about it. On the other hand Andy was at the beginning and development of his career and it was almost his, his career was almost a distraction from his... in a way, I think from my observation... from his mourning. He had so much to do. I was just about ready to retire when my mother died and I was retired when my father died and had a lot more time on my hands to reflect, like oh geez, I'm 65. Am I was looking at less time this way than if I had lost my parents in my 30s or my early 40s, when my children were young and they took up a lot more of my time. So I think that the age to me of when you lose them sort of colors your embracing of life because in my case with my father dying at 94, it suddenly dawned on me, hey, I gotta get things done, I don't have as much time as I thought. The clock is ticking. And I gotta move here. But if I were 35 or 40 I would see that as a long way down the pike.

- SN2 So I don't necessarily agree with that hypothesis because I myself have both parents alive and I think I really embrace life in a way that's sometimes more than a lot of people do. And I also feel like I look into and explore the topic of death and move from having it be something that was very scary to me, from something that used to feel very scary, to understanding it more, and feeling more accepting of it. And that all happened without my own parents dying. So I mean my in-laws have died, but I have to say they were in Israel and I was here and I was not... DN was going back and forth and I was not so I was not intimately involved with their death. But there are other people, one grandmother in particular who lived with my parents when she was in hospice and I saw her every day. I think the very first time we were here you asked how we formed our view of death. And it's like the experiences that we each had with it and the role modeling we saw wherever it came from, whether it was from a friend who was dying and her view on it or my parents taking care of my dad's mother. So I have both parents, but I don't feel like I'm behind the ape ball at all in embracing life and respecting death.
- DN1 I think that there are so many variables that you don't account for that can influence one way or another. What Karen mentioned, what you mentioned, what Susan mentioned, it's a real issue cause your parents. It's not whether they are deceased or not deceased. Some people cannot wait for their parents. I'm sorry to say that, but you know what I'm talking about. And some people it doesn't matter what age they are, when their parents die, they are devastated so I'm saying that there are too many variables going into your hypothesis that I'm not sure that you can control them and can influence one way or another and has nothing to do with your hypothesis.
- AK1 You're saying though that that's the only thing. So we're all affected by those other variables while we... Have we lost close friends at a young age? Things that really make you stop and think. A friend of mine lost... when his father died, and he was fairly young at the time. To him the significance was, all of a sudden he realized we're the next generation to die.
- SK2 Not to live, but to die.
- AK2 But there are so many variables for any one person. You could have both of your parents alive, but suffered other tragedies to deal with that could have the same effect.

RM2 I agree with all the multiple variables, but my dad passed away. My dad was thirteen years older than my mom and passed away three years younger than my mom. So there was a fairly large gap. And when my dad passed away I said, ok this is pretty crappy. But as one of my friends told me, when my mom passed away, I was an adult orphan. And to me that was just such a powerful major next step and I could rationalize it, my dad a little bit older than my mom, but there's still another generation. And there's still somebody else to look up to and there's still somebody else to tell you all the stories about when you were a kid. And then three years ago I just said, there's nobody else who can tell me anymore. And that really made much much more of a change in the way I viewed things than I thought I would. So I think when you're the oldest one in the family so to speak, it doesn't make you appreciate life any more than you would have before, but it brings it into such sharp contrast that you almost take another look at everything. And I don't know if I'm saying it right, but I have a tremendous appreciation for life because my father was older and I saw what my mother was still able to do. But then when she passed away, it really, really, it took all of the other variables and all the other yeah buts, and it's like ok, you're next. I'm also an only child so by default. And that's why I... yes, I agree with all the other variable issues, but to come back to your first statement, it really hits home.

VLA3 You think when the second parent died... It's interesting the very first sentence of the next section which is background, why did I choose to study this. Now that both of my parents are gone... opening sentence... this is refrain often heard in the midst of bereavement following the death of a second parent. And you both said that.

DN2 Are you the oldest in your family?

VLA4 I'm the youngest.

DN3 So I think you mention that you're next in line because you lost your sister.

VLA5 But you're next in line in the generation.

RM3 Generations... you know, we're next.

SK3 The parents to the kids.

VLA6 But I wasn't speaking of myself. It's something that I hear all the time.

- SK4 I call it mortality musical chairs, you know the music stops and who doesn't have that seat. I lost my first friend when I was 22. He had cystic fibrosis and he was a year or so younger than I was. And I remember going to the funeral and looking around and there were all these kids from the block. And we were all grown up and he never really got there. He was at that point maybe 20. And we all looked at each other and said, this is the first, don't ever forget it. It was shocking. That was a year there were three deaths from that block, two parents and one child. And it kept meeting and we said we have to stop meeting like this. But when you talk about the last parent, I think at one point I did talk about when we went to Florida to deal with dad's apartment. It was one of the first trips down there... no one was waiting for me and that felt strange. The funeral, our son was already there waiting for us to come. But on this trip if the plane was delayed, nobody would have known that we weren't coming.
- AK3 It's also a difference when you lose a first parent, you're very much wrapped up in caring for the needs of the second. When you lose the second, you've got nothing to think about, but you. This is uplifting. [sarcastically]
- SK5 But I think you also think to yourself, what could I... what didn't I say, what could I have said, could I have done anything differently. I didn't think about that with my mother, but I thought about it with my dad.
- AK4 It also depends on how... I mean, not just age, but a long suffering kind of illness, dementia... you lose them, but you don't know when exactly.
- VLA7 You lose them but you're still caring for them.
- AK5 Or suddenly.
- SN3 A friend of mine... my best friend's father just died a few days ago. And he had dementia and was in the hospice program for the last six months, but right after they got him in hospice, he was all of a sudden doing so well. And it was kind of surprising and then all of a sudden a week ago he just dropped and he was falling down. He lived in California and she lived in Massachusetts and she had things she had to be at this weekend. He died on Thursday and they weren't gonna be doing a funeral; they were gonna be doing a memorial service on the east coast in August, so she made the decision that she was not going to fly out there. Her sister was there and her half-brother was there. So I said to her in a text message – not necessarily the best way to communicate – I said to her even if you went there you'd only be able to communicate with him energetically cause he was not

conscious so you can do that same thing from where you are. And think about... there was a lot for her to forgive from her father. So I said just meditate on it and forgive him for the things he's done wrong. Think about the things that you're grateful for that he did you for you and provided and then give him permission to go, and let him know you're ok. And then just give love and receive love. And so I wrote this whole nice thing and she never responded to it. I think she thought, there goes SN again or something. But I meant it, I meant it sincerely. She can still do it now even though he's gone. But there's a... I don't know, it just seems like even if there's a bad relationship, there are... there's communication on that level that can happen that can release that. And anyway...

AK6 I also think that when a parent dies, part of your whole process takes stock of the life in the sense that he or she always wanted to do this but didn't get to and I'm gonna make sure I do. Or they did this and I want to make sure I do this, all things like that. It's almost a signal to access the rest of your life.

RM4 I think also on that point, even recognize how much or how little depending on your point of view how much your parents provided for you, gave you, in terms of experiences, not financially. And then you, well for me it happened too. Oh now I'm the one who has to do, even though I've been doing it for the last twenty-five years for the knuckleheads, but now it's my turn to do those things that hopefully they will say in 30, 40, 50 years, oh yeah, I'm glad that mom or dad did that. So now it becomes... and it's the natural order of progression, hopefully, that one parent goes and then you think ok and then mom or dad is next. When they go, now it's me. So I think that along with... and here's something comical. I think that ever since my mom passed away, I look at the obituary pages. I never did other than some baseball player, some football players, some rock musician passed away. I never did that. And now I look at it and what scares the crap out of me is, not the little obits, but the bigger ones. Now there are people that I grew up with in baseball and tennis and oh crap – they're 72 years old. I used to idolize that person. Uh Oh.

AK7 Mickey Mantle's forever 32

RM5 And I'm forever 15.

SK6 Last week when I was here, the joke I always think about is George Burns. First thing I do is open up the obituary and if my name is not in there, I get up and have breakfast.

AK8 You know, what's also a real trip? When your doctor dies. It happened.

KM3 It happened to me.

VLA8 It happened to me too. What did that feel like?

KM4 Very scary. I was so not prepared for that.

AK9 But it's another caregiver, I guess.

KM5 I don't know... I never even... It's funny because...

AK10 Was he old?

KM6 Yah, when my gynecologist died, I had just seen him maybe a couple of months before and then when I called in for an appointment, I was told that so and so took over. And I said, oh why? I don't know that doctor. Well, because he passed away, and I was so shocked and quite honestly, this is the gynecologist I will remember, not because he was a nice guy and felt that he was very competent, but because he died. I will always keep his demeanor or his mannerism or his... I will always keep that. It was a shock that he died, that he died. Maybe because he was a caregiver.

VLA9 The doctor that delivered Judah, my first. My OB/GYN was on vacation and so his partner delivered him and within weeks he died suddenly. He was in his 50s and his wife found him in the morning in front of television. It was very troubling. So how was that for you?

AK11 It was a shock. I should say that my doctor was maybe a few years older than me, 4-5 years, within.

SK7 He wasn't old.

AK12 But... when you... I guess aside from the caregiver, he's a contemporary. And that's a real symbol of gee, this could happen to me. Or Linda, a lost school friend died a couple of years ago from pancreatic cancer. And again, this could happen to me because Linda was the kind of person... you never thought death could catch up with her.

SK8 Or Frank.

AK13 Yeah

SK9 Or Ira. We've had a few.

SN4 Anyway, one way which I sort of can see a way to agree about your hypothesis.

VLA10 You don't have to agree or disagree. It's to open a conversation.

SN5 One thing that I can see is that people who have experienced the death of a parent where they've had to be very involved in it, I think are more conscious and aware of the many issues that come up and so they might be looking into those protections for themselves where they might not have it they hadn't experienced ... The living will, making sure that disability insurance, long-term care. I think once you go through it and see the impact of not having those things or of having those things and the difference it made, it can make a person much more aware of what they need to do.

AK14 I'll tell you after suffering with my father through dementia, I try everything I can to keep my mind active, to try to prevent ever getting to that. So that's a way of embracing life, maybe fanatically, but it's a way of embracing life.

VLA11 Well, we've talked about some of the things that we do. What do we do to maintain our youth? The flip side of that is what do you do to defer death? And all the health things we do and mind things that we do and all things like cosmetic surgery we talked about last week.

AK15 Tattoos

VLA12 You [S and D] missed it.

SN6 We were zip lining in Vermont

VLA13 I know that picture of you zip lining was definitely embracing life!

AK16 And back therapy!

SN7 It was amazing, honestly.

SK10 I don't even go on step-stools, I get dizzy.

SN8 I am terrified of heights and I really got over my fear.

VLA14I was in Costa Rica and I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it.

AK17 What exactly does embracing life mean?

VLA15What does it mean? It's just words and it's words to engender curiosity. So what does embracing life mean?... which is really what I was asking the last couple of weeks. What does embracing life mean? When I read that text last week, specifically from Deuteronomy which we read on Yom Kippur morning, I [God] set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life therefore that you and your children may live. So what does it mean to choose life? What does it mean to embrace life?

AK18 For my father, before he went into dementia, embracing life was literally proving that he could do everything that he always did even if it meant totally mistreating my mother, which he didn't mean to. And for me I kind of think it's, I'm kind of running out of time to get all of this right. So I think of it more professionally, but also in terms of my relationship with you [SK], I try to be more – I was always great! – more devoted, more caring for my kids. But it's not necessarily, ok, I always wanted to take a bicycle ride across country... it's not that kind of thing.

VLA16Talk more. So what is it? Embracing life? Choosing life?

AK19 For me it comes more like in the form of realizing that there's a limited amount of time left and you've been screwing things up for forty years, and you only have this amount of time left. It adds a sense of urgency, but also adds a sense of urgency to do good things, fun things that you hadn't done before. I guess maybe that's one reason why we sold the house and moved.

SK11 We didn't want the burden of the house.

KM7 I got a new computer. It's a Microsoft. It's a small one. It's got a touch screen. It's wonderful. I love it. Until I have corrupted files and that happened five times within ten days and then I can't use my computer and I can't do anything with. And so Gary comes home and he wanted me to get a Microsoft rather than an apple computer. He'll try to fix it. He is not available for anything else because he's sitting in front of that computer that I'm starting to hate and in the end, I explode. I haven't exploded in a very long time. And I can deal with an explosion with Gary. This time Talia, my oldest was at home as well. After my explosion

usually there are two things... I feel good about it because it got out and I feel very ashamed of it as well. But now I keep thinking, it's bad enough that I explode, much worse is that my daughter will remember this. And if anything happens to me, this is her last thing she'll remember... mom going totally nuts over her computer. I've never had that before where I was kind of nervous how my misbehavior will actually come out. It's so much since the kids moved. I'm so much more aware of it. And I don't want to be remembered like a crazy woman, which I totally am when it comes to things I have no control over and I'm losing my husband over it because now he really wants to help and do this and I just don't have the patience. We have only a few things that will cause that. #1 my computer which by the way I returned yesterday, #2 if I have to deal with any kind of services. Let's say you call up the phone company, the gas company, this and that, you get disconnected. You start all over again. That's... I have no patience for that, none!

SK12 Try dealing with insurance companies.

VLA17 So you raised several really important things. One is the things over which I have no control is a whole topic. And what's the ultimate thing over which we have no control.

KM8 Life

VLA18 Or

KM20 Death

VLA19 We have more control over life. How we live our life. But no control over death. So the things over which we have control. And you talked about your legacy which is something I wanted to get into. And I didn't want to jump before you were finished. But last session maybe this is a really good time since you really introduced it. What's the legacy... and you've all kind of touched on it a little bit. What's your legacy? Because the day is gonna come when you're not gonna be here. The day is gonna come when I'm not gonna be here. What's the legacy.

S13K Well, you did the memorial service for my dad where we read the letter from John about Grandpa. And he touched on the things that he will remember about my father. Because our grandchild is living in St. Louis and I don't get to see her as often as I'd like, it dawned on me last night, she's in second grade, she reads and writes. So I texted my daughter-in-law, and I said, I know she has access to one of

your old phones. Do you object if I text her every once in a while. And she said, no I think it's a good idea. Except my son said to me, we'll get a little concerned about her screen time. But I wrote to her and I said, I enjoyed the pictures of your tap dancing festival this weekend and I could see that you had a good time and I'm looking forward to celebrating my birthday with you in September. I miss you and I love you. She wrote me back, just a few words, and said, I miss you too. But because I don't get to see her as often as the other grandmother does who lives up the road.

VLA20Duly noted

SK14 I have no control over it, but I have control over how she sees me, and how much I can connect with her now. We used to skype with her a lot, but now I can write to her. And even wrote to her and I said it's exciting that my baby now read and writes. So I would hope that when I'm not here anymore, she will have that compilation of, even grandma was not here physically, she made it a point to make her presence felt.

AK21 How about the custom with the nails?

SK15 Yah, we have a custom that whenever I come out, the last day we go to the nail place and she either gets a mani-pedi or just a manicure. And if I should "forget" she'll wake up that morning and say, Grandma... But it's just her and me. It's our time to be little girls and I have a good time with her. She gets to pick out her own nail polish. It's our thing. And I started that when she was three.

VLA21So legacy...

RM6 I'm gonna go back one topic... embracing life. To me it is very simply creating memories and that flows into the legacy bit where you just mention is gonna create or has created a memory that probably will survive at least one more generation beyond your granddaughter. And I think that's to me the real value... And I can't remember if I said this in one of the first meetings. One of the most chilling things I heard about a year or so ago was, people die three times. You die once when you die. You die the second time at your memorial service. And the third time you die is the last time anybody ever says your name. And that... How do you extend your legacy? How do you extend that third time? To me it's just purely memories.

AK22 And thus was born the concept of the naming opportunity.

RM7 But you know Lincoln has created a lot of memories. My great grandfather, not so many.

AK23 If you're rich, you get buildings named after you and things like that.

RM8 Legacy

KM9 But that's...

AK24 But the legacy we think about is the one we're gonna leave in the hearts of our loved ones.

RM9 And the legacy of the naming is who's that? They named a gym after him. Who was that? No idea who that person is.

VLA22I'm named for my grandfather David. I don't know anything about him.

RM10 But it's the memories whether it be the visuals or more like the experiences or the conversations. I think that's what ravel's one or two generations.

SN9 One of the things that's had a huge impact on me is going to memorial services for my parents' friends. And I sit there, first of all, these are people I've known for many, many years, but I realize I didn't know and listening to people share stories about them, their kids sharing stories, their grandchildren sharing stories, their co-workers sharing stories, I just have been... it's actually been like a really positive experience. And I felt like I learned so much about these people and I was inspired by them, learning about things that they've done. And I've attended most of these things with my parents so I've very much had in my mind when I'm there that... thinking that my parents are wondering, will people say such wonderful things about us. And then I think I've even thought about that for myself. Well, will they say wonderful things about me? And would our kids do what their kids are doing for them right now? So that's something. And what you were saying is really significant, too because the wonderful things we do have an impact and the not wonderful things have an impact. And the loving ways we act are remembered and the crazy ways we act are remembered. And so...

AK25 And what we do after we explode? How we handle our own misdeeds?

SN10 Exactly. What we do after. And how you repair that as opposed to just leaving it, letting it sit? Oh it'll get forgotten about. It's not a big deal. But it is a big deal and so it's what you do, and what all of us do, after that to repair that and talk about it. Sometimes apologize, sometimes say even wow I really lost it over that and better would be "ba ba ba." It can be a teaching moment and then you feel good about it. You know what I mean? I think it can be a teaching moment and a moment of connecting as opposed to just a bad memory that's loading there and leaving a little dart.

SK16 But there's a reality that we all have the acceptance of our children. No one's perfect. There's no such thing as a perfect parent. I don't believe it. And those who always... As my kids were growing up, those who sort of would say, my kids have never had that, or my kids... I've never had a bad moment with my child. You know, that parent walks away and I'm thinking, I must be doing something wrong. I remember saying that to a mother and she said, no, she's just not being truthful... because we all have bad moments. We are not perfect. And I think when you can admit that you're not perfect, it gives them room not to be perfect, too because there's a lot of pressure in trying to be perfect. You can go nuts trying to be perfect. And it also makes you a control freak because in trying to be perfect, you are constantly trying to be in control, either in control of yourself or in control of things around you.

VLA23Control is such an important word that you brought up and now you're bringing it up again. And I go back to my statement that the one thing over which we have absolutely no control is our death, how we die, when we die. Will it be a long illness? Will it be a sudden death? All of those...

SN11 Although there are some controls people have over their death. Like, you know, my friend Nancy, who died a few months... like a year ago. She knew that she had leukemia. She had had numerous rounds of chemo over a period of like fifteen years. And the last round she was just like, I can't do this anymore. And she really made that decision and she really orchestrated her death. She orchestrated memorial service.

VLA24But she got leukemia in the first place. That was the moment at which she lost control. And she did those things to take control. But ultimately we really don't. So the question which I put out there which is another way of saying what I've asked previously is, between now or whenever in our lives, and that unknown time and circumstance, what do we do to choose life? And therefore what will our legacy be. And not the troubling things, and not the rosy colored things. Just what

do we do to choose life? Which is a different question from what I asked previously which was, what do we do to stay young? What do we do with the reality to be the best 50-something, 60-something, 70-something, 90-something that we can be. What do we do to choose life? When we sit there at Yom Kippur services and we listen to the text, I set before you life and death, blessing and curse, choose life, therefore, that you children may live, which may be exactly what you're talking about. But what is that, choose life? What does that mean? What will you think about when you hear those words? When they resonate [reverberate] in the sanctuary?

SK17 I think for me it was the fact that I felt a very a very strong need to be affiliated. That I needed to be...

VLA25Talk in the present

SK18 But to be affiliated it was a congregation... gave me an identity. Somebody knows who I am, I know other people. To feel it's very difficult to feel you're going through life faceless. As if, if I comment that I felt very much living in my former community. That I said, if I never came back to this house, who would know other than you [AK]. Who would miss me? I lived in a community, but I felt faceless. And that's a horrible feeling because you're not feeling like you're leaving a legacy. And when I came to this congregation, I felt because of its size and because of its intimacy that I wasn't faceless anymore. You could live a long life and still be faceless. So it's not just the years, it's what you contribute to those years. I think I remember reading about the mark between your birth and your death – the line.

VLA26The Dash – it's a poem.

SK19 The dash. Is it? What is it? Is it just a dash? Or is it, what is that life fulfilling that dash? And that really resonated with me. What's in that dash? So I felt that we hadn't... We had left the congregation where I felt faceless, but I needed to feel a member of a Jewish family. So in that way, it is part of my identity, my legacy, my life.

VLA27So seeking and finding Shir Ami, that's one way that you choose life?

SK20 Right.

AK26 It interested me, you [SK] choose the term faceless. To me so much of what we do is to bring faith to the six million. Well, I mean, I know that I felt very strongly personally. We thought about... I have a friend, things like that. I just said I could never leave the dish because I'd feel like I'd be deserting the six million. I almost like when I touch a Torah, in our old synagogue, we knew the background of some of the Torahs, I could almost feel the sweat of generations ago from Poland, Russia, whoever it was, that were touching it. They have a legacy too.

VLA28 So you're carrying on their legacy through your legacy.

AK27 Part of it is carrying on the legacy.

KM10 I think for me embracing life is to keep the connection with my family, my immediate family, meaning my children, my husband. I would always be willing to work hard to have that connection with them because it's so important to me. And it is easier as my kids are getting older. I'm not one of these parents who says, oh it was so nice when they were little. I love every stage of their life, the tiny baby stage was my least favorite because I was not in control. They would cry and even with my milk, they were not satisfied and nothing I could do. But I think having that connection with them now and feeling very strongly about my relationship with Gary is very important to me. So more than before I think, it doesn't mean that I'm trying to connect to friends and old acquaintances, nothing like that. It's really just my intermediate family is really important to me. And maybe that's part of the legacy because I want them to... you know, not doing it consciously, I want them to remember me for whatever reason. That was a mom I could count on. She would listen to me, she would help me, she was there for me. She can be crazy too, but there are the things that were good.

DN4 Well, I guess I came from a different generation, and a different background because for my parents, life started, I guess when I was born, or when they survived the Holocaust and they got together. They never wanted to talk about what happened and even though we lost all of our family, they never discussed it. They never talked about it. And if I asked, they answered the question, specific to what I asked and that's it. I agree with you that life is what you have. It's, it's... I mean I.L. Peretz was an author, a Jewish author and he wrote a story about when you're going to heaven, then they're checking all the good that you did and all the bad that you did and then they decide which way you are going, up or down. And one soul came and it was just even, and then they sent him down to find. It's a whole story about... they found three situations to bring upstairs to the upper echelon, whatever they called it, to the judges and they will decide if what s/he

brought... To me I don't. I don't count. I just... I live. And I know that I am human, and I know that I am making some wonderful things, and I know I'm making a lot of mistakes. And you know what? My parents were wonderful people, but they were not perfect. And there were times when I... you know... and everybody... I mean not everybody, but at least in my family. But I'm not going to remember the bad things because there's no reason for that. I'm only going to remember the good things. And for me I know that my parents were good parents until I left home. And they still stayed good parents, but I'm not dwelling on what happened. And the same thing with my children. I'm not going to worry what they are going to think about me all the time. Yes, explosions happen, and very recently, but I give my children respectively 22, 26, and 28 years of my life. And I hope they will get at least 50 or 60 years, I know I'm pushing it. But still the time will come when I will go. You know, it's their choice what they want to remember, and I'm not going to worry about what they're going to remember. Because I usually aim to do the best thing I can. Yes, many times I screw up, sometimes more than many times, but it happens. And I will continue living my life. So what is embracing life? It's just to... as I said before, to live. I mean, I didn't think I'm going to go to Vermont and go on a zip line. But SN came up with the idea, and I said, ok let's try it. Oh and the other thing... I just want to have fun and enjoy myself. And enjoy with my wife and enjoy with my children if I can, and the rest will just take place. So I'm not worried about what people will think, I'm not worried about what people will say about me in the funeral, how long after I die, they will keep about talking me. I'm not worried about that.

RM11 Well said.

AK28 That's great. So we won't have to spend a lot of time on you, writing the eulogy.

RM12 It's interested because you've given me the impression that you've learned that from your folks. I would bet all the money in my wallet, your kids have learned very much the same from you. They've learned things from you, but I think that legacy of the way your parents have lived their life, has just made a couple of stops and then continues.

DN5 I agree.

VLA29 [to DN] That is the legacy. You don't have to think about... you don't have to plan your legacy. You don't plan your legacy, you don't have to think about it, and every time you speak, it's so consistent. From the first time you spoke sitting

over there. That I just live! That's what my parents did and that's what I do. It's very moving, and again so very consistent every time, however we frame the question, it comes down to the same thing for you. And that is who you are and that is your legacy.

AK29 I also think what's really our legacy is not what things people are going to say about us in the time of mourning. He didn't practice cannibalism or whatever they're gonna say that's nice. But what a real legacy might be is, after I'm gone, did my son or daughter act differently because of the way I influenced them whether or not they even thought of me when they did it. Did a client that I worked with have a better life or a better business, whether or not they think of me. I guess our legacies don't actually have to be spoken and listed.

SK21 To be emulated.

AK30 Yeah, I mean the effect that we have down the line. For example, there are people I knew in the synagogue. They don't know how I think about them, but watching them and how they acted meant a lot to me.

SK22 I believe that one of your greatest legacies is that your son's a good father and good husband.

AK31 That's enough for me right there.

SK23 He's devoted to his wife and his family and he would walk to the end of the earth barefoot if he had to, but I believe he learned that...

KM11 You have one son and you have a daughter as well?

SK24 I have a younger daughter. But I believe if anyone wants to talk about a legacy.

SN12 I've had a really interesting thing going on in my life recently, which is my sister has come back into our lives after 15 years of zero contact. And she spent four days with us in Vermont, and it was great. Everything has been great. So she was in an abusive relationship and it was like she had to live in this dark, isolated hole, basically. And there was no going out of it and there was a lot of mind control stuff. And she's now outside of it, and it's hard, it's hard for her at this moment to... It's like she's really clear she doesn't want to be there, but there's still this gravitational pull. But it's like watching her live life which she has not done for twenty years, watching her live life is so much fun. It's like the joy she is getting

out of everything and I feel like it's... well, somebody said to me it's like having your sister come back from the dead. And in a way it is like that because I had really given up. After seven years, I was like, that's it. So I didn't think I'd ever hear from her again. And we are loving each other so much and we're having so much fun. And just the giggles out of her with tubing and with swimming in the river and everything. It's like she hasn't done any of those things for all these years. And it's like watching a child take their first steps and be so excited. And so it's like being with her has sort of highlighted for me that we are living life. She wasn't living life. She's now living life with us and observing us living life. And she's living life. And her excitement makes our living life more exciting because it reminds you that you are living life. And also being in the mountains and everything... just noticing the life around you, stopping to see the flowers, hear the sounds, see the mountains, feel what the air feels like, just that is so living life. And not being just... and not seeing what's happening around you.

AK32 You know SN, in a way that experience is also... I see it also as part of your legacy to your children because they saw you as a person that was willing to accept back your sister. Some people would say, she walked out, I don't want any part of her. So that's something about you, something your children will remember. And what you just said about the mountain air and the scenery, I sometime think it would be great if we could live life as if we were photographers. People that really stop and look at these things and know how to do that.

VLA30 When we travel with Amira as we did in South America, where they lived for six months, Noah and Amira, and we visited for a week. And she's a photographer and artist and she would spend ten minutes on one flower, taking it this way and that way, and this lighting and that lighting. And when you said that, it brought back the memory of watching, seeing the world through her artistic eyes, it was so much fun.

SN13 And I have to say, some people would say, put the camera down and just enjoy the experience while you're there. But I have to say, capturing those moments is amazing because I can go back... I have hundreds of pictures from this week. And both the scenery and feeling of the zip line, and the joy in my sister's face, it's captured in the picture. And relooking at it and sharing it with other people, it's amazing to me. So we were talking this weekend about how the old cameras where you put the role of film in, and you snap, snap, snap, half of them might not come out. Or have a terrible expression. You bring them back when you come back from your trip. It takes another week. Or they were developed and then if

you want copies to give to somebody, you had to bring the negatives back and that took another week or ten days. And it was so different. Whereas this, you can capture the flower a hundred times, you can capture the face in every moment, and then go back and pick out the ones that really get it. And so the views, the fun, the love, the activities, it's amazing that we can... we really can capture our lives in pictures.

VLA31 In this little thing right here.

AK33 I guess when you take a picture, you're also making a judgment this is also worth remembering.

SK25 How about when the store loses your film?

AK34 How about when my father took polaroids. Years ago my parents went on a cruise with the old polaroid and you had to rub some sticky stuff. He takes a whole day's worth of pictures and take them out and they were all stuck together.

SK26 So it was – no memories.

SN14 [showing picture] That's me and my sister.

SK27 Where does she live?

SN15 She lives in Connecticut, but two hours away.

AK35 But two hours and you've been separated by fifteen years.

KM12 What's her name?

RM13 Has anybody seen the movie Boyhood?

VLA32 Not yet

RM14 I saw it and it is very, very apropos to this discussion. That's all I have to say about it.

SN16 That's the one with the boy who was followed all those years?

RM15 Yeah.

VLA33 How many years was he followed?

RM16 Twelve

VLA34 So our assignment is to go see it.

RM17 I mean, yah it's so, so apropos to the legacy and living life thing.

VLA35 That's it?

RM18 That's my comment because if I say anything, it will...

SK28 Ruin the picture.

VLA36 So we'll make the connection?

RM19 So when you see it and you like it a lot, you'll think more highly of me.

VLA37 That's your legacy.

SN16 Part of having kids, where you just have to hope that they get the good part of your legacy, but you can't really necessarily be guaranteed and you just have to accept that sometimes, I think.

DN6 I think it's a given. I think that all kids will just accept their parents. Some of them will take two years, some of them will take fifty years, but they all will get it in the end, believe me.

AK36 I agree because as you age, you can also look back on your parents and try to understand some of the behaviors that you might not have appreciated at the time, or really felt like you were abused at the time, and you can sort of understand it a little bit, and maybe forgive.

SK29 I had a magnet on my refrigerator which I can't do anymore because it's stainless steel. But it says... one is, I survived a Jewish mother, and the other one says, mirror, mirror on the wall, you are your mother after all.

AK37 And then the one I got her that says, I smile because you're my mother, I laugh because there's nothing I can do about it.

KM13 I never even gave it a thought about my funeral, the eulogy for my funeral, any of that. Not once. I do have to say I have a great aunt... I call her a great aunt. She was so wonderful when my mother passed away and she took over and helped. And she was there for us. I have a picture of her... she was in her late 90s when she passed away. I lived here. I didn't have much contact to her, but she was always so dear to me. And the picture is downstairs on the wall pinned to a wall. Anyway, and that's... her legacy to me or my legacy to her, I'm not sure how you would see it, but every day when I do laundry, I look at her picture. I'm sure nobody else in this world really thinks about her anymore because she was so old and she had lost her whole family. So it would be my twin sister and me who really do still remember her. And I would forget her as well if I wouldn't have that picture, but I see the picture and it's a warm feeling.

RM20 Do your kids have any...

SN17 But they know the story...

KM14 They know, they know who she is, but they don't have... you know, they're kids and they're teenagers and they're very involved with themselves. So a picture like that they have seen has no meaning really to them because they don't know the person. Also, again, that's my German life. I did not bring much of it over to this country. So whatever my past, this is not really what my kids got involved with... which is fine.

AK38 I ask again. Does each of our legacies have to involve someone thinking of us at a particular moment? Your aunt transmitted certain values to you that you're transmitting. So the years down the line...

KM15 No, you're right.

VLA39 And to people who don't even know her or she knows even exist.

AK39 And then maybe people who don't even know us are acting in accordance with our values.

KM16 You're very right.

SN18 Also the whole thing like you throw a pebble in the water and ripple... So it's like her legacy was the impact she had on you which made you the person you are and then things that you do that impact other people. So it's all connected.

AK40 Yeah. A legacy's not necessarily a plaque.

VLA40Right... Or a list of attributes.

DN7 Continue with that is... my mom was always a very giving person. Since I remember her, since I was born, she never worked in her life, but she always volunteered for different organizations, WIZO or Volunteer for Soldiers in Israel, whatever it was. And I remember her taking me when I was young to all those functions to help. I mean, she was working and I was a little one who was helping too. And I know that I transfer a lot of that to my daughter with my Special Olympics and now she's with Special Olympics. My daughter is a special ed teacher and I know that my mom's legacy, if you want to call it like that, is 100% you can see it with my daughter. So even if you don't talk about it. I don't know the last time my daughter talked about my mom, but it's in her.

VLA41And sometimes you don't even know why. I see things in my children and I'm moved to say, my father lives and they didn't know him, my mother lives and they didn't know her. And yet there's definitely things that I see in them and I know it was transmitted through me, but I don't remember it being... I'm not conscious of it being transmitted through me, but I see my father in this or that, or I see my mother in this or that in them.

SK30 Sometimes I read Jonathan's posts on Facebook. He's very politically oriented and he's very social... he has a strong social conscious. And I once said to him, you really... you sort of do me proud in your positions on things. And he looked at me and he said, don't you remember me dropping with dad at 6:00 o'clock in the morning? He didn't ask me to go. I wanted to go.

AK41 He was always interested in that.

SK31 I wanted to go. And he said I've taken that with me into adulthood. And there are things you do with your kids that you do it for the purpose, but you don't know how much they're gonna carry with them. Sometimes they surprise us. They'll do things or they'll say things and you smile 'cause you didn't know if it really stuck, or you don't know if it made an impact. Then you'll see a post on Facebook and

you know. Oh, you got it! You really got it! I'm glad, I'm really glad. 'Cause we didn't preach it.

KM17 One of my three younger sisters, the older one of my three younger sisters, did always have a very difficult relationship with my mother. And I asked my mother once, isn't that more for concerning. I'm not related to my mother, but she is more of a mother to me than she was to her own daughter. And doesn't that concern you? And she would say, not really because by the time she's going to have a child, she'll appreciate me, but she can't do it now. She's so right. So right. And I like that idea that we can't do everything the way we would like it to be because it feels right, it should be this way. But other circumstances actually can make our, whatever we do, right at different times. So I always thought, if I do have a difficult relationship with my oldest daughter, which I had for a while, it will be ok. One day she'll be a mother and then maybe she'll appreciate that.

AK42 We have to remember that when we interact with our children, we're interacting with the maturity that we have as a perspective that they don't yet have. So maybe when they gain it then they start to see it.

KM18 But not all of the time. You can really have an attitude towards things that you think is so right, but it really isn't.

AK43 We're all wired differently. Some people are just gonna be their particular way. It's not good, bad, right, or wrong.

VLA50 So our last time together formally. Is there anything you've learned about yourself? Or learned about one another that you're grateful for having been here?

KM19 Ok, first of all, I spoke to Talia, my oldest daughter about what we had discussed, mortality and all of that. And it was after we had talked about getting insurance because we don't know how we're going to end up one day or whatever. And Talia said to me, if you and dad get really old and you can't live on your own anymore, I would take you in. And I just thought that was so nice, so nice. So I didn't know that about my daughter that she feels like that towards us. That's one thing. The other thing is I was just thinking the other day in the shower, I don't know why in the shower, but anyway.

VLA51 I do my best thinking in the shower.

KM20 I am afraid of death, even if I would say I'm not. In the end I am afraid of it because I don't know how it's going to happen and when it's going to happen. And then I thought in my family, meaning my German family, death was always something that was not discussed, disease was not spoken about. My real mother died and I didn't even understand the funeral. Any of that stuff came from there and I think that when I have to deal with a situation where death could be imminent. And let's just say we had a ferret who ended up with seizures and we had to put her to sleep. Seryna was holding the ferret when she had an attack, holding her tight so she would jump out of her hands and holding her to her body and was not scared of her while I could not deal with it. The animal did not suffer, that's what the vet said. The second he saw her, he said, she's beyond... she doesn't understand what's going on. In seizures you usually don't have pain or anything associated with it. But anyway, I realized that anything that has to do with death actually scares me... or disease, or whatever. And I don't know how to deal with it, I do not know. And this was very interesting to me to talk about this and to get... I mean just your history. I mean, RM, I know you, I've known you for so long. And I know your boys, your knuckleheads, as you call them. And all that, but I think you're very well spoken and you get your points very well across. And I get a lot out of that. And DN, what you were saying before was, he embraces life. All the time. He's very consistent with it. I totally see him that way. And I think you[AK] have really good points. You get down to the ground of things and you're actually able to explain them, which is great for me because a lot of times I have things in mind, but I wouldn't be able to put them into words.

AK44 Yeah, but I think it's interesting to watch things come up as you think them through and the thoughts that come out.

KM21 Yeah, but I think of all the people, you're the one who answers actually the questions or gets to it directly. That's my feeling. And I love to listen to your voice [SK] I think she has such a beautiful voice. To me it just sounds... it's a very warm one, even if you raise your voice, it still stays warm.

SK32 Not all the time.

KM22 Not yelling, I have never heard you yell.

AK45 You don't want to hear her.

SK33 I've had my rants and raves, believe me.

VLA52Let Karen finish.

KM23 But I have to say what you said when I first came here, the first time I met you and you were talking about your father. I kept thinking this is such a lucky woman for having had a father who seemed to really understand her. And so that was great. And then SN is always great. There's never anything negative to say about SN. SN just embraces everything so, but SN is also somebody, when she talks, everybody is quiet. And she speaks slowly which I personally like because I can follow a little better. I just feel like it goes in better, I understand it a little better. And, well in a way to me you're [VLA] that high up. But I have to say because this is what Gary and I were talking about. Teachers that... you as a rabbi, bosses, I look at them in a different way. I would never want to be disrespectful. I would not want to be personally close, emotionally too close because I have to have that distance. And that's engraved in me, that's from my childhood, the way I grew up. If you would say to me, just call me Vicki, I would say, thank you Rabbi Axe because that would be just too... But I'm just saying. From the very beginning when I met and you took over with Talia's education, and I then remember last second we realized we can't do the service and the party at the same place, it just won't work, Gary decided it just wasn't a good idea, and that was just two days before her Bat Mitzvah. And I called you up and said you have to help. I don't know how to explain it to Gary, we can't change anything anymore. You said, that's ok, no worries. You spoke to us and it might have been in Gary's mind before that maybe we should separate them, but by the time you left, it was like never there. We were so calm and I just think that's so great about you.

VLA53That was very meaningful... what you experienced and observed about each person that we've had the privilege to share these times with. And you've brought so much to the conversation as well. Would anyone like to comment?

SN19 Yeah, I would like to. So I know KM pretty well. We've been in a group together for a long time. So one of the things I felt that first time here when we all shared where we got our views about death from.

VLA54What's been your experience with death was the question.

SN20 One of the things that amazed me was how much I learned about everybody. I've known RM a really long time too. But KM and I have been in a group where we've talked about a lot, a lot of things and I still learned so much. And I loved the fact that we had the opportunity to sit here and talk about topics that aren't usually talked about. And it was in the setting where each person gets a chance to

talk and be heard and trying not to interrupt. And I just really appreciated everything that everybody has said and brought to this. And I just remember that first day with you [KM] talking about your family and I was so amazed hearing the whole story and realizing I didn't know all that about you. And it was just very moving. You've been a great contribution to every conversation – everybody has been.

VLA55 Speaking with such openness and candor and respect.

AK46 It was a really interesting experience, first of all getting to know every one of you better. We're the new kids on the block. It was a wonderful experience, but it also was interesting because we weren't taking different sides of an issue, debating anything. This was how each of us felt about whatever it was we were talking about. And that was very nice. But I want to say that I liked everybody here when we started, but my affection for all of you has really grown.

SK34 I came here just between the time I lost my dad and also facing my 65th birthday on 9/11. But I came to realize what I really wanted from it. Part of the conversation sort of focused on what I really wanted for my birthday and nothing else. And that was to be with my family. And it meant traveling. We have a daughter, a second one, and she's not always connected to us. It's been one of those rollercoasters for a number of years. And I said to her, John and Patty aren't gonna come out for my birthday, but I need to be with my family, my 65th. Do you want to come? And I had braced myself for her to say, nah. And her comment was, I'd love to come. And I think she must have heard me go whew. And she said, no, it's a special event, a special day, it's a milestone birthday, and I haven't seen my niece in two years. I definitely want to come. And I thought... it's gonna be a very special birthday for me. Some of that time with you, sort of made it crystalize, what did I really want for that birthday?

VLA56 What about being here brought you to that?

SK35 Talking about family, how important it is. My family's always been important, but because she always has been difficult and disconnected, it made it more important to me to pull her in, and not assume that she didn't want to go or she didn't want to be with us. It sort of said ok, you have to understand that she's our adopted child and I never believe that she was any different in my eyes or in the way we treated her. As a matter of fact the day the judge finalized her adoption, he looked at me and said, I notice that your first child is biological and this is your second child. Do you feel any differently about them? Of course, I broke into

tears and he felt terrible and he started handing me tissues. But Jonathan was 9 years old and he remembered that and he said I was so grateful that you said that, that we're not any different, we're not any different. And he reiterated that when she was Bat Mitzvah'd.

VLA57I'm curious how that evolved because it's not unusual for the first child to be adopted and then the second child to be biological.

AK47 We're dyslexic.

SK36 Well, I was what they call a DES daughter. It was a drug that they gave to pregnant women who supposedly try to prevent or ward off miscarriages. And it not only didn't do that, it caused all kinds of troubles, all kinds of problems for the babies. The mothers weren't affected, but the children were. And I ended up with at least three of the factors. I had an atopic pregnancy before Jonathan. I had an early delivery with him. And I had secondary infertility after him. And I went through counseling with it. It was very hard to accept. And remember a counselor looking at me and this is what crystalized the idea of adoption is... I can't help you have a baby, but I can help you have a child. He said you're not going to become pregnant. I did, but lost it. And she said this child will not be born under your heart, but this child will be born in it. And that's what made me realize that I didn't want him to be an only child and I didn't want him to be alone although sometimes she makes it hard to be not alone. But when she was Bat Mitzvah'd – they're nine years apart – and there was a sibling prayer. And he looked at it and he said, I'm not doing this. I gotta write my own. And I took deep breath cause I knew what was coming. And he looked at her and he said the day you came into my life I was now complete. My family was complete. And no matter where we are, whether our parents are here or not, I will always be there for you.

AK48 I'll never forgive him for that. I was sitting on the bima facing everybody. So everybody's getting emotional.

SK37 The tissues are coming out and the rabbi looks at me and I go [shrugs] and she finally pulled it together as she continued the rest of the service. And then after the service was over she started crying again. And one of her very good friends came up to her and said it's over. Enough, let's go take care of the party. And she went OK. But thing is that he was always good to his word. He's absolutely good to his word about his sister. Part of that is what is the legacy? When he said, whether our parents are here or not, I am here for you. So again I feel like what he said was part of what we gave him. He was there with us when we picked her up.

And he was in the car when the birth mother gave her over to the lawyer. He was with us for the whole thing. And he even came into school with – in those days – candy cigarettes. And he was handing them out with I'm now a big brother. And he wrote about it and I still have that in her baby book. So it's legacy, it helped crystalize what I really believed.

AK49 [to RM] If your grandchildren are called nuckleheads, you'll see your legacy.

VLA58 So RM what's your take-away from these weeks together.

RM21 I think I told you this the first week that... I went into this with the sense of you were looking for information from us and didn't realize that in your conniving way, this was a very much of a two way discussion. And then it became a multi-way discussion. That you were forcing me to think about things as well as answering your questions and then all you have done it. The other observation is the blinding disparity between us individually and yet the silver thread that runs through all of us expressed differently with slightly different twists based on experiences, but the very much of similar view about what this whole merry-go-round is about.

VLA59 Can you be more specific – what's the disparity and what's the silver thread?

RM22 All the things that we talk about that make us different from the different experiences we've got. [To SN] Two parents that are 90. [To KM] You lost your mom when you were a child. And yet, picking on those two, there's so much similarity between the two. There's some human instinct that gets us all thinking in a very similar fashion. And that doesn't come out with meeting each other on the High Holy Days for fifteen minutes before services or fifteen minutes after. And I guess th... I don't mean to be schmaltzy, but the gift of six or seven two-hour sessions... we can just sort of throw the rest of the stuff to the side and really think about things. It's pretty powerful. So thanks.

DN8 I'm not a very spiritual person. As SN once mentioned, I live for the moment and that's what I do. And I don't think about motives and reasons. I just... things are happening. And as I said with my parents you live and you die and that's it. And you continue. So when I heard about this I said to myself, well why am I going to talk about death? And I didn't come to the first session. But SN came home and said how wonderful it was and it's really worth-while and you should go. So come and you'll benefit. So what did I get? I got the fact that as RM mentioned, I started thinking about, out of my little square, about life and death and I don't

know what I will take away from that, but I realize that different people have different thoughts about life and death, different people have different thoughts about embracing life and what life is all about, stuff like that. It was interesting and what will happen in the next few weeks or whatever, when I go home. That's what I will take away.

AK50 I think it was interesting that there was almost never an instance when somebody would make a point that I couldn't relate to in some way. Even if it started out, well gee I don't really feel that way. As I heard it, there was a way that I could relate to it.

DN9 Another thing is also how I feel, I'm just continuing your thought, is in each one of you is really in me and every little thought about... I'm not saying the whole thing, but something of each one of you I can identify in myself. And that's what you are talking about.

VLA60 So I think you brought up a very good point at the very beginning which was that there are other factors. There are other variables. And one of which is how old were you when your parents died. And another is how old are you as you're having this conversation. And I was 23 when my mother died, 22 when my mother died, and 29 when my sister died. And I'm not the only one who's had that experience, but I believe it's had an effect on how I think about death. What happened is that death really happens. And I think most people think that if you have that thought that it's a depressing thought and I don't think so at all. In fact when my sister was very close to death, she was in a teaching hospital and a group of residents were gathered around, maybe eight of them, and she died maybe two days after this particular visit. And she said, I believe death is part of life. And she didn't talk about a notion of what's gonna happen. She just stated it as a fact. It was just a fact. Death is part of life.

So if that's true and it's the one thing over which we have no control, what do we do about it. I find I'm very existential, like you [DN], but different from you. It's just there and I think if you look at that square in the face, and I've had my own personal brushes with death with breast cancer and heart disease, I realize that if we weren't living when we are now, when I had that heart attack, I wouldn't be here – before stents. It occurred to me tonight really for the first time. And that was pretty powerful. But death is going to happen, I am going to die. I think it allows us, instead of it being taboo, and denying it through all kinds of means, all kinds of means. All the exercise in the world is not going to avert the severe decree, brain exercises. And all the plastic surgery is not going to make us live

longer. And being really good at sports and keeping ourselves physically fit – it's all good and it all makes life better, but it's not going to avert death. And I believe that by just saying, knowing I'm going to die, it sort of gets that out of the way. It's not depressing, it's just a reality and now here's this reality, here's this moment that I'm living in. And looking at the flowers and not because I'm gonna die, but because I'm in this moment. And what I think it does for me is make the most of every possible moment I have. And I think that comes through in everything I do, every word I write. I want my sermons... I don't believe I'm a great scholar, but I know what people feel, because I feel.

SK38 One of the jobs that I was hired in, the person asked me why did I choose to teach? And one of the things that I said was that by teaching I was touching eternity. I got hired. But I do believe it.

VLA61I was thinking about that before when you were talking – and I'm sorry to interrupt – but in terms of that ripple effect, I was thinking of all the ripples that teachers... and in ways you don't even know.

AK51 Is there any one of us that does not remember with some fondness a teacher that we had?

SK39 Or even the opposite feeling.

RM23 Oh I remember both extremes, but I don't remember the 65% in the middle.

AK52 But teachers impacted us.

RM24 I learned from the positive and the negative.

VLA62And you don't even know the teachers affected us. It's like you don't even know the things your parents or grandparents or great grandparents rippled, trickled down and through you. And you don't necessarily know the teachers who had that effect or the effect that you have on other people. And I believe we're all teachers.

SN21 Right. And it could be a teacher of one your teachers that inspired that person to be the kind of teacher they were and that impacted you. So it does keep going.

SK40 Because I remember a student saying to me, how come you don't let us do our projects at home? I said because you'd cheat because I once helped my son do the same thing. You gotta do it in class. You gotta do the projects in class. And I told

him the story when a teacher had given him an absolutely ridiculous project to do and he had trouble with it. And finally I said get out of here and I'm gonna finish this off cause I can't stand the torture anymore. I just can't live with it anymore. And we finished it off and he went to school with it and about two weeks later I come to pick him up and he said that the secretary said oh he's in the principal's office. Oy, what did he do? And he comes out with a blue ribbon for this project. And as I walked him out I said give me that ribbon, that ribbon's mine. And he was hysterical because he said he knew. The principal said it was a lovely project and he did say but my mom gave me some help with it. And I said give me that ribbon. And I told the kid the whole story and I said that's why you need to do the project in school where I can help you here and you don't have to put your parents through that torture.

KM24 In fifth grade my son had to do a project where he made a car that had to go a certain distance. That was the whole idea. And I did help him a little bit because I just felt it was easier for everybody in the family if I had some input. When we brought his car to school, it was a little nothing compared to what some parents did. And all the parents came, fathers came into school to drop of their project.

SK41 It was probably outsourced to GM.

KM25 It was just so unbelievable, so unbelievable the cars that they presented.

Appendix K Sacred Aging Flyer and Press Release



Boomers and Beyond, Sacred Aging, Press Release
Monthly Conversations for the Third Act of Life
with Rabbi Vicki L. Axe and Friends
October 7, November 4, December 2, January 6
February 3, March 2, March 30, May 4, June 1

Congregation Shir Ami of Greenwich, CT is offering monthly conversations for Boomers and Beyond to discuss “sacred aging” while facing the reality of our own mortality. “How we view our mortality,” notes Rabbi Vicki L. Axe, “impacts the way we live our lives. Human existence has a beginning and an end, and I believe that if we can accept the raw truth that life as we know it is finite, that, at the appointed time, we will die, then we can live more fully.” Rabbi Axe will facilitate all conversations with speakers invited to share their wisdom and expertise on a variety of topics that impact the “third act” of life.

Rabbi Richard F. Address, who will speak December 2, is the Founder and Director of www.jewishsacredaging.com. This project on Sacred Aging has been responsible for creating awareness and resources on the implication of the longevity revolution with emphasis on the aging of the baby boom generation and its impact on all aspects of Jewish communal and congregational life.

With Rabbinic Ordination (1972), Honorary Doctorate (1997), and Doctor of Ministry (1999), all from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), as well as a Certificate in Pastoral Counseling from the Post Graduate Center for Mental Health, Rabbi Address has served as rabbi for congregations in Los Angeles, Carmel and Cherry Hill, NJ, and Director the URJ Pennsylvania Council before becoming full-time Director of the URJ Department of Jewish Family Concerns which he founded.

Rabbi Address has authored numerous articles, book chapters and books related to the issue of aging, and contributes articles for web sites on spirituality and aging. He co-chairs the Committee on Spirituality and Diversity for C-TAC (Coalition to Transform Advanced Care), serves as Rabbinic Advisor to Men of Reform Judaism, and hosts a weekly radio show in Philadelphia called “Boomer Generation Radio.”

Todd Marschall who will speak March 2, is a financial advisor specializing in Life Insurance, Disability Income, and Long Term Care Planning. With a double degree

in Economics and Business, and Government, Todd's mission is to help people attain financial security for themselves and their families. Knowing that no one can predict the future, his goal is to help prepare for the best and worst case scenarios and create a long-term relationship based on quality service and integrity. Speaking before colleagues and lay people alike, Todd motivates and inspires confidence in seeking solutions to the challenges that life brings.

Jeff Graham, who will speak March 30, is founder and past president of Transplant Support Organization. Started in 1997, TSO is a Westchester based support group for transplant patients and their families, caregivers, donor families, interested individuals, and professionals. A life-saving transplant recipient, Jeff is very active in spreading the word about the need for organ, eye and tissue donors. He spends two days a week speaking to high school health classes, and speaks regularly to wide variety of civic and religious groups.

Nancy Collamer, who will speak May 4, is an author, coach, speaker and recognized expert on second-act careers, semi-retirement and boomer career trends. With a BA in Psychology and MS in Career Development, Nancy is the author of *Second-Act Careers: 50+ Ways to Profit Your Passions During Semi-Retirement* and a contributor to *Not Your Mother's Retirement* and *65 Things To Do When You Retire*. Writing twice-monthly career blogs for the PBS web site NextAvenue.org and Forbes.com, Forbes recently named her website, MyLifestyleCareer.com, one of the "Top 100 Websites for Your Career."

Nancy has also written columns about lifestyle-friendly careers for a number of major websites, including AARP, NextAvenue.org, and Job-Hunt.org, and her advice has been featured in numerous media outlets, including NBC Nightly News; the New York Times; CNN; the Wall Street Journal; Redbook; Ladies' Home Journal; More; O, The Oprah Magazine; and Fortune. Nancy enjoys sharing her expertise with live audiences, both large and small, and has spoken at venues ranging from Harvard Business School to the California Governors' Conference on Women.

Rabbi Vicki L. Axe, who will facilitate all conversations, is the founding Spiritual Leader of Congregation Shir Ami in Greenwich, CT. She was ordained as a cantor by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in 1983 and ordained as a

rabbi by the Rabbinical Academy of America in 2008. Bringing joy, warmth, and caring to Jewish life and practice, Rabbi Axe has taught at HUC-JIR and Academy for Jewish Religion (AJR), visited many congregations as scholar-in-residence and is currently studying for her Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Care at HUC-JIR.

A national leader in the Reform Movement, Rabbi Axe was the first woman president of the American Conference of Cantors (ACC), served on the National Board of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), and currently serves on the School of Sacred Music Advisory Board. She also serves her community as a member of the Jewish Educators Council of Greenwich and Stamford, the Greenwich JFS Health and Healing Center Advisory Council, co-chair of the Greenwich Hospital Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Professional Consultation Committee, and is a past officer of the Greenwich Fellowship of Clergy. Known for her caring and warmth on and off the bima, it has been said that she “invites an awakening of the Jewish heart and the human spirit.”

All are welcome to these monthly conversations. For more information about worship, education, and all Shir Ami events and programs, please visit www.congregationshirami.org or call 203.274.5376.

Appendix K Tom Hussey selected photos from “Reflections”



Bibliography

Address, Richard F. (2012). *Seekers of Meaning*. New York, NY: URJ Press.

American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013. Web. [online March 26, 2014]. dsm.psychiatryonline.org.

Austad, Carol Shaw. (2009). *Counseling and Psychotherapy Today: Theory, Practice, and Research*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Axe, Vicki. (2008). Beginning Recovery, Finding Blessings. In Douglas J. Kohn (Ed.), *Life, Faith, and Cancer* (pp.126-149). New York, NY: URJ Press.

“Baby Boom Generation.” <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2061.html> [online August 7, 2013].

Becker, Ernest. (1973). *The Denial of Death*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

“Bereavement.” <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/bereavement.html> [online March 28, 2014].

Brown, Erica. (2013). *Happier Endings, a Meditation on Life and Death*. New York, NY: Simon and Shuster.

Buckley, Peter (Ed). (1986). *Essential Papers on Object Relations*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Cherry, Kendra. “Life and Death Instincts.” [About.com. Psychology](http://psychology.about.com/od/sigmundfreud/a/instincts.htm) <http://psychology.about.com/od/sigmundfreud/a/instincts.htm>. [online April 21, 2014].

Cowan, Rabbi Rachel and Dr. Linda Thal. (2015). *Wise Aging, Living with Joy, Resilience, & Spirit*. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, Inc.

Death Café. <http://deathcafe.com/>. [online December 10, 2014]

Dittes, James E. (1999). *Pastoral Counseling, The Basics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

- Fairbairn, W.R.D. (1986). "A Revised Psychopathology of the Psychoses and Psychoneuroses." In Peter Buckley, M.D. (Ed.) *Essential Papers on Object Relations*. (pp. 71-101). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund (1856–1939). (1922). "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." <http://www.bartleby.com/276/1.html> [online April 22, 2014].
- Friedman, Rabbi Dayle A. (2015). *Jewish Wisdom for Growing Older*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing.
- Harris, Darcy. (2010). Healing the Narcissistic Injury of Death in the Context of Western Society. In Jeffrey Kauffman (Ed.). *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma* (pp. 75-86). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC.
- Hussey, Tom. "Reflections." <http://www.tomhussey.com/PROJECTS/REFLECTIONS/thumbs>. [online December 10, 2015].
- Isaacs, Rabbi Ron H. and Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky. 1991. *A Jewish Mourners Handbook*. Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.
- Jacoby, Susan. (2011). *Never Say Die, the Myth and Marketing of The New Old Age*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc.
- Kauffman, Jeffrey. (2010). On the Primacy of Shame. In Jeffrey Kauffman (Ed.). *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma* (pp. 3-22). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC.
- Kay, Alan A. (1993). *A Jewish Book of Comfort*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc.
- Krueger, Richard A., and Mary Anne Casey, (2000). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. (1969). *On Death and Dying*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company.
- Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth and David Kessler. (2014). *On Grief and Grieving, Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

- Lamm, Maurice. (1969). *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers.
- Millward, Lynne. (2012). *Focus Groups*.
http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/46878_Breakwell_Ch17.pdf [online March 21, 2016].
- Mitchell, Stephen A. and Margaret J. Black. (1995). *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- “Nones on the Rise.” (October 9, 2012). http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/?beta=true&utm_expid=53098246-2.Lly4CFSVQG2lphsg-Koplg.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com [online December 7, 2015].
- O'Brien, Tim. (1990). *The Things They Carried*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Polish, David. Editor. (1988). *Rabbi's Manual*. New York, NY: Central Conference of Rabbis.
- Potok, Chaim. (1967). *The Chosen*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Prichep, Deena. “Death Cafes Breathe Life Into Conversations About Dying.” *Around the Nation*. <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/08/173808940/death-cafes-breathe-life-into-conversations-about-dying>. [online December 10, 2015].
- Reidbord, Steven. (2010). Countertransference, an overview. *Psychology Today*.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sacramento-street-psychiatry/201003/countertransference-overview> [online November 4, 2015].
- Richmond, Lewis. (2012). *Aging as a Spiritual Practice*. New York, NY: Gotham Books.
- Schermer, Victor L. (2010). Between Shame, Death, and Mourning: The Predispositional Role of Early Attachments and the Sense of Self. In Jeffrey Kauffman (Ed.). *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma* (pp. 33-57). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC.
- Schwartz, Richard C., Ph.D. (2001). *Introduction to Internal Family Systems Model*. Oak Park, IL: Trailheads Publications.

- “Senior Housing and Health Care Options Definitions & Terms.”
<http://www.seniorlivingguide.com/resources/definitions.htm> . [online March 29, 2014].
- Stern, Chaim. , Editor. (1992). *Gates of Prayer for Weekdays and at a House of Mourning*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis.
- Stern, Chaim. Editor. (1996). *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*. New York: Central Conference of Rabbis.
- Storr, Anthony. *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*. (1989). New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Syme, Daniel B. *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*. New York: UAHC Press.
- Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. (1985). Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Tyree, Alex. (2010). A Hospice Worker’s Reflections. In Jeffrey Kauffman (Ed.). *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma* (pp. 87-109). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC.
- Wicks, Robert J. (1985). Countertransference and Burnout in Pastoral Counseling. In *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling, Volume 1*, (pp. 76-96). Wick, Robert J; Parsons, Richard D; Capps, Donald Ed., Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1986). “The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship,” In Peter Buckley, M.D. (Ed.) *Essential Papers on Object Relations*. (pp. 233-253). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1986). “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” In Peter Buckley, M.D. (Ed.) *Essential Papers on Object Relations*. (pp. 254-271). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Worcester Polytech Institute. (2016). Research Methodology, Focus Groups.
<http://libguides.wpi.edu/c.php?g=355454&p=2396416> [online March 21, 2016].
- “You've got to find what you love,' Jobs says.” (June 14, 2005).
<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html> [online March 17, 2014].