



# PRAISE FOR *LIVE LONG, DIE SHORT*

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“*Live Long, Die Short* is the Rosetta Stone of successful aging. Beautifully written by Dr. Roger Landry, this book translates the most up-to-date science related to human wellness and vitality into an engaging guide to a better life. I especially appreciated Dr. Landry’s fluid, reassuring prose. He has a bright future as a writer.”

—William Thomas, MD, founder of the Eden Alternative; author of *What Are Old People For* and *How Elders Will Save the World*

“The philosopher Camus once said something like this: ‘In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.’ Roger Landry’s book is the invincible summer human operator’s manual. It blows up long-standing aging stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies and replaces them with evidenced-based attitudes and behaviors that can transform the aging experience for each of us, and for those whose lives we touch every day. None of us wants to age. Yet, our attitudes, our lifestyle, and our management of inevitable health conditions built into our gene pool or caused by chance are factors we can either accept, manage, or change our outlook about so as to maximize the fulfillment of life as we age. A must-read—even more: a must-reference. The Dr. Spock book for aging! Keep it on the shelf and dog-ear parts that you will refer back to often. Roger’s book is well done, honest, and hopeful.”

—Larry Minnix, president and CEO of LeadingAge

“In *Live Long, Die Short*, Dr. Roger Landry presents a wealth of practical and scientifically sound recommendations on what it takes to age successfully. This book not only provides readers with implementable, life-altering strategies but also educates them about the human potential that exists in later life. It will change your expectations of aging. *Live Long, Die Short* is a must-read for everyone who cares about living well at any age.”

—Colin Milner, CEO of the International Council on Active Aging

“Dr Landry’s message is that both society and the individual can do much more to ensure we live our best lives as we age. He is a pioneer in his field, and his holistic approach in *Live Long, Die Short* will resonate across generations.”

—James Taylor, president, Division Southeast, Sodexo Healthcare Services

“Ten thousand Baby Boomers turn sixty-five each day, all marching to a destination, in fact to many different destinations. Now, they’ve got a road map to chart their journey into later life. Dr. Landry is the physician we’ve been waiting for. Now he’s written us all a prescription that will help us reach our goal of successful aging.”

—Harry R. Moody, PhD, retired vice president at AARP

“*Live Long, Die Short* provides us with a road map to truly maximize not only quantity but also quality of life. Dr. Landry has clearly illuminated the path and taught us that each and every one of us is in the driver’s seat and in control of how we age.”

—Robert Winingham, PhD, author of *Train Your Brain: How to Maximize Memory Ability in Older Adulthood*; psychology professor and chair of the Psychology Division at Western Oregon University

“At last, some practical guidance on aging better. Dr. Landry’s empathetic yet motivating message is

a breath of fresh air. Authentic health! This concept is so simple and rational, yet a breakthrough in our understanding of what makes us healthy. *Live Long, Die Short* is a must-read for all who struggle to age in a better way.”

—Charles H. Roadman II, MD, Air Force Surgeon General, retired; former CEO and president  
Assisted Living Concepts Inc.

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# LIVE LONG, DIE SHORT

A Guide *to* Authentic Health  
*and* Successful Aging



ROGER LANDRY, MD, MPH



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This book is intended as a reference volume only, not as a medical manual. The information given here is designed to help you make informed decisions about your health. It is not intended as a substitute for any treatment that may have been prescribed by your doctor. If you suspect that you have a medical problem, you should seek competent medical help. You should not begin a new health regimen without first consulting a medical professional.

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FOR MOM AND DAD



*Lucky parents who have fine children usually have lucky children who have fine parents.*

—JAMES A. BREWER

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I never could have written this book without help: inspiration from the magnificent Masterpiece Living Team for what they have achieved in changing aging in this country; support and opportunity from my brother, Larry, a visionary who continues to surprise me; the prodding of my good friend George Devins; the fabulous Greenleaf staff; encouragement from the hundreds of older adults who graciously urged me to write down the words I shared with them in their lecture halls, dining areas, and living rooms over the last fifteen years, and many of whom in turn shared their inspiring life stories with me; the understanding of those most prominent in my world: Paula, my wife and lifelong companion, my inspiring adult children, Jen and Jeff, and supportive close friends—all of who allowed me to be periodically absent from my life during the last year in order to bring an idea to reality; and most of all, Jackson, Dylan, Hunter, and Abigail, my grandchildren, who unknowingly kept me at the computer with a hope of making their world better than mine.

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# FOREWORD

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This is a remarkable book—remarkable for its candor, its range, and, most important, for the scientific validity of its information about how to age successfully.

**Candor:** This book is not an autobiography, but in the course of explaining his current work and his dedication to a health-promotive lifestyle, Dr. Landry is candid about his own life and his career of twenty-three years in the US Air Force. He is explicit about the disappointing discovery, shortly after his retirement from the Air Force, that his central emphasis as a physician—preventing disease and deterioration—was considered, at least by some medical providers, as an unprofitable alternative to dramatic and expensive repairs of damage already done. Finally, he is candid about his enthusiasm for the accumulating evidence that a combination of diet, exercise, supportive social relations, and productive activity can really bring people closer to a better aging experience.

**Range:** Roger Landry's main purpose in writing this book is to enable people to live long and successfully. In an uncertain world, nothing can guarantee this outcome for each individual, but the accumulating experience of doctors and medical researchers can teach us a great deal about how to improve the odds in our favor. Dr. Landry's knowledge about successful aging has the depth and practicality that comes from the combination of research and direct doctor-patient experience. The book also includes a kind of autobiographical subtext that adds to both a reader's interest and confidence in its advice.

That story line takes us from Landry's graduation from Tufts medical school to his twenty-three years in the Air Force, from which he retired as chief flight surgeon with a rank of colonel. That long career was followed by a shorter interval in the private healthcare industry, and now a third career as a key player in the development and demonstration of a life-changing pattern of successful aging, and president of an organization that aims to make that pattern increasingly visible and effective in retirement communities. Nor is this the end of the story. Roger Landry is acutely aware of the fact that successful aging in upscale retirement communities, encouraging and crucial as it is, leaves important questions still to be answered: whether and how those opportunities and that lifestyle can be made available to the larger population of low-income, affordable-care residents, and how it can be extended to the far larger population of older men and women who choose—insist—on remaining in their homes, homes chosen without regard to the limitations of old age but filled with the memories and the physical reminders of earlier years and family life.

**Scientific validity:** Potential readers of this book should not assume that its colloquial title and its intimate, conversational style involve a casual attitude toward scientific data. The hyphenated adjective *evidence-based* is far more prevalent than the serious demand for evidence and the recognition of its presence or absence. Roger Landry is tough-minded about these issues, and his book benefits from that fact. Masterpiece Living, the initiative that he describes in the initial and final sections of his book, came out of research: ten years of surveys and experiments supported by the MacArthur Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. The Masterpiece Living organization continues to add to that knowledge base, by evaluation of its own efforts at application.

I conclude this brief foreword with a personal note. In my world of academic research, statements about possible conflicts of interest are now required, so here is mine: I have been involved in the development of Masterpiece Living. However, my participation is unpaid, so while my judgment may be biased in its favor, it is not by reimbursement.

Finally, I write this as I am about to celebrate my ninety-fifth birthday. I try to follow the combination of diet, exercise, social relations, and productive activity that is advocated in this book.

As to whether I have lived my whole life this way, I reply as a terse New Englander did to a similar question: “Not yet!”

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Read this book. You will certainly enjoy it. You will almost certainly learn from it. And most important, it may bring you closer to attaining the ideal of its title: live long, die short.

—Robert L. Kahn, Ph.D.  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

## WHY THIS BOOK?

People write books for many reasons. For me, it wasn't an easy decision. With so many fine books on aging by experienced and gifted authors, I wondered what I might add to the accumulating mountain of knowledge on the topic. So I procrastinated. That, as it turned out, was a good thing. It allowed, my friend Bill Crawford tells me, my unique voice to develop further. It allowed the varied elements of my experience—preventive medicine, public health, social research on aging, an avid interest in cultural and biological anthropology, and forty years of attempting to keep people healthy and performing at their best—to simmer, stew, and blend until the end result was indeed unique. It was that uniqueness that cried out for expression. I knew then I had to write this book. Without that procrastination, that ripening of my accumulated experience, I would never have undertaken the journey, or, having begun it prematurely, I would have fallen victim to the lonely and emotionally challenging process of bringing a book to life, and never finished.

And isn't that a metaphor of sorts? In a book about aging, about what eons of human experience have taught us about being healthy and fulfilled, about the potential pitfalls of pursuing untested and immature concepts about health and aging, isn't it fitting that its writing be a long and thoughtful journey? And isn't it also fitting that this author went through periods of uncertainty, changing views, and development to reach a broader vision? Indeed, like all of us, the idea needed time to mature.

Since we're going to travel this road together, allow me to introduce myself—in single words: Humanist, husband, father, grandfather, brother, animal lover, naturalist, speaker, writer, biker, horseman, physician, kayaker, traveler, meditator, vegetarian, beachcomber, hiker, Europhile, musician, lover, pro-military, antiwar, procrastinator, pack rat, cross-country skier, secular, health conscious, romantic, movie lover ... OK, you get it. The trait I hold most dear, however, is humanist.

One of the more pressing questions facing humanity today is simply stated: How do we achieve and maintain health as we age? I wrote *Live Long, Die Short* to offer you a harbor in a storm. We are bombarded with the latest research report, with the newest diet, the next miracle fitness machine, all of which claim to help us stay healthy, live longer, to even fight aging (good luck with that!). It's not that many of these new discoveries don't have value, but the barrage of claims, many contradictory and many just plain erroneous, have us chasing our tails as we seek to age in a better way. And so, *Live Long, Die Short* is meant to be a practical guide. It answers questions such as

- What can I do to stay independent?
- How can I live life to the fullest for as long as possible?
- How do I lower the likelihood that I'll get Alzheimer's disease?
- How can I minimize the effect of diseases and conditions on my life and on my family?
- What are my risks for decline and what should I do to lower those risks?
- Can I really change my lifestyle?
- How will the aging of America affect my life and that of my family?

Be reassured that you are not alone if you are struggling with these questions. My goal is to offer you answers and, more importantly, to provide you basic knowledge and tools with which to evaluate

the endless assault of new and often sensational claims you face every day in your quest for better health. Rather than give you the proverbial fish, I wish to teach you to fish. I offer you a gold standard to assess any health claims, a standard based on what we humans require to maintain health and to age well, a set of necessities I call *authentic needs*. “Authentic” because they are solidly based on who we are as humans. “Authentic” because these needs are firmly established over the eons of time man has walked the earth and because they are durable despite the dramatic changes in how humans live today. An appreciation and understanding of these authentic needs will act as true north as you maneuver through the stormy seas of new “discoveries,” of quick-fix solutions to complex issues of aging, “anti-aging” claims. Understanding these needs will help you realize that aging is fundamentally a gift, a natural and wonder-filled process, which despite its highs and lows can lead to an outcome we all want and can achieve: authentic health and successful aging.

Another goal of this book is to present a challenge to each one of you, to your organizations, and to our towns, cities, and society—a challenge to incorporate what we have learned about aging into our opinions, practices, and very way of living, so that all can reach their full potential at any age. The aging of our population leaves us a choice: grow or decline. Either we provide environments and public policy that allow older adults to grow or our very societies will decline with them. *Live Long, Die Short* is a call to action, for just as Albert Einstein admonished—“Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act”—we all, knowing what is possible, cannot accept the status quo of aging as decline. Whether in our private lives or in the public policy we accept, we must speak out for a more enlightened view.

*Live Long, Die Short* is also the story of my journey with Masterpiece Living, an exciting organization that has accelerated a movement to change how we age. This book is the encapsulation of what my associates at Masterpiece Living and I have learned over the last fourteen years from older adults striving to age in a better way, from researchers, and from the outcomes and observations of thousands of aging men and women. What is particularly unique about this book, however, is that we have resisted the common impulse to merely report findings and recommend that the reader change accordingly. Rather, we have evaluated our newly acquired knowledge in context. First, in the context of us as a unique species, hundreds of thousands of years in the making, formed in radically different environments than today’s; second, in the context of a modern lifestyle marked by unprecedented levels of stress; and lastly, in the context of a culture with an obsession for short-term outcomes and unrealistic expectations for change, accomplishment, and success.

No matter who you are—older adult, aging boomer, college student, or anything in between—you are reading this book, you are most likely curious, well educated, active, positive, concerned about your health, and an early adopter of new ideas. As we travel through this book together, let’s have a conversation. Read, react, and write to me at [droger@livelongdieshort.com](mailto:droger@livelongdieshort.com). Perhaps we can also continue the dialogue at [www.livelongdieshort.com](http://www.livelongdieshort.com).

*This book will change your life.* It will help guide you on your path to aging successfully. We have discovered that we can indeed shorten the length of our period of decline. We therefore have every reason to believe that by living a lifestyle that reduces our risks for disease and impairment, we can indeed live long also. Not like the Greek mythological unfortunate Tithonus, whose lover asked the gods to allow him to live forever without considering how he would age. Her wish was granted by Zeus, and Tithonus was doomed to live forever, getting older, declining, becoming more feeble. Rather, my goal for you is to be the very best you can be, for as long as possible; or, as the beloved Mister Spock from *Star Trek* said so well in Vulcan: *dif-tor heh smusma*, live long and prosper.



## THE TIME OF OUR LIVES

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.*

*Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

—MARGARET MEAD

I live in New England. The spectacular colors of the fall foliage are compensation for long winter, spring insects, and temperatures not so temperate. I am drawn to the brilliant reds, oranges, and yellows of autumn, and I've decided that these magnificent leaves are a metaphor for how I want to age. I want to become more colorful as I grow older; I would like to blend with others to make more beauty than I can alone; and when my time comes, I want to fall from the tree.

Yet, in the twenty-first century, the main causes of death for those of us living in developed countries have shifted from infections and accidents to chronic diseases, and I am now less likely to age according to my metaphor. Longer life expectancy, and the preeminence of heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, chronic lung disease, and Alzheimer's as companions in this longer life, will statistically relegate me to an end more like a death scene from an old Western movie: long and painful (and expensive). No wonder we hear many say they have no wish to live to be a hundred. Wouldn't most of us choose quality over quantity? Wouldn't we choose to avoid what could be a decade or more of decline associated with loss: loss of function, social connection, independence, dignity, and control over our own lives?

But for most of the last century, we accepted that there was no choice. We believed either genes or luck determined how we would age. Some of us would live highly functional lives well into their ninth and even tenth decade, but these were few, and it didn't change the overall belief that aging was a crapshoot. Get through those turbulent young years and you might live long, but with a good chance of unwanted conditions continuously nipping away at the quality of your life.

Enter Jonas Salk, the medical researcher and virologist who discovered and developed the first effective vaccine against polio. As a highly influential member of the board of directors of the celebrated John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in the early eighties, he challenged the board to study success and failure in aging.

This approach was a breakthrough because, up to that point, researchers on aging had approached the subject only as a process of progressive decline. The focus was on the "inevitable" infirmities and how to deal with them. The foundation, Jonas argued, should rather focus on vitality and resilience in the older adult and what it was that fostered these more successful outcomes. In 1984, the foundation assembled the Research Network on Successful Aging, a group of sixteen experts from a variety of age-related disciplines, and began what was to be a decade-long study on aging. They wanted to provide fresh insights into aging in America. Their findings forever changed our attitudes toward aging, jolting us from the Dark Ages of our understanding of this common human experience. The major finding? *How we age is mostly up to us*, and that conclusion rocked our stereotypes of aging to the very core.

# The seed is planted

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In the fall of 1991, in a taxi on its way to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, Larry Landry's life took an unexpected turn—one that changed everything for him and perhaps for all of us. Larry, my brother, was the chief financial officer of the MacArthur Foundation, and he shared that taxi ride with Jonas Salk. Salk was filled with optimism. He had just heard the preliminary findings of the foundation's study on aging. He told Larry that these findings had the potential to change the aging experience of all but that, to do so, the research findings would need to be applied. Larry pressed him further for clarification and Dr. Salk explained. Without application, the findings would lie fallow. Applying them meant essentially bringing them to life: having the full understanding of what successful aging is could fundamentally change the very essence or culture of a community and society. He suggested that a senior living community would be an ideal place to begin to show what might be possible. The small size, fairly homogeneous demographic, and possibility for peer and staff reinforcement of a better lifestyle were all characteristics of an excellent social research initiative.

The seed had been planted, and although it was planted in an unlikely place and would take years to sprout, it was in safekeeping. Larry had spent his career in the financial world and had held positions as chief investment officer and chief financial officer for various not-for-profit organizations. In 1998, he founded Westport Asset Management, a company dedicated to acquiring and developing continuing-care retirement communities. That same year, Drs. Jack Rowe and Bob Kahn, lead investigators of the MacArthur Study, published *Successful Aging*, an account of the study that explained the results and debunked multiple myths about aging. Larry was ignited by the book. He knew it was time: time to answer Jonas Salk's challenge, time to make the findings of the MacArthur Study available to more people, and time to put them in a form that could change lives and societies. With Westport, Larry had access to precisely the communities Salk thought would be best to test the findings of the MacArthur Study. What he didn't have were the people to make it happen.

And so, in the latter part of 1998 and early 1999, Larry persuaded Bob Kahn and an eclectic group of experts in aging to begin exploring how to apply the research findings on aging. They would essentially be a skunk-works for the application of successful aging. Thus, the Healthy Aging Working Group came into being. The group included, in addition to Larry and Dr. Kahn, Dr. Denis Prager, former director of the MacArthur Foundation's health program and member of the Research Network on Successful Aging; Steven Blair, president and CEO of the Cooper Institute; Dr. Kathryn Hyer from the School of Aging Studies at the University of South Florida; Katie Hammond, a doctoral candidate in aging studies at the University of South Florida; and several senior-living-industry experts. Over the following months, two more members were added: Dr. Toni Antonucci, from the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, and Dr. Gordon Streib, noted gerontologist and sociologist from the University of Florida. The group was formidable—but it would add one more unlikely member before it would be complete.

## The merging of worlds

I spent most of my adult life as an Air Force flight surgeon. My task: keep aviators healthy and performing at their best. Trained as a physician, with specialty training in aerospace medicine and occupational medicine, I experienced a military career marked by exotic travel and unique experiences. My patients, more my friends and mates, were young, vibrant, highly capable people. So how was it that I landed in the middle of a movement to change the face of aging?

On a sweltering day in September of 1981, I sat in my office next to a legend: Brigadier General Charles Yeager, the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound. "Chuck," as he was known to the

rest of the world, had returned to Edwards Air Force Base in the Mojave Desert for a flight physical exam. Though retired from the Air Force and fifty-eight years old, he was still flying as a consultant to the Air Force and defense contractors. I was the chief flight surgeon at Edwards, an aviation buff and totally in awe of the man sitting in front of me. Having completed the physical, General Yeager kicked back in his easy West Virginia way and told me stories of his more-than-illustrious career. At one point, he became quiet for a moment and then announced that he planned to break the sound barrier again on the fiftieth anniversary of the October 14, 1947, event. Most of us are reluctant to admit to huge mistakes we have made in life, but I'm owning up to this one. I responded to the announcement by telling *the* Chuck Yeager, the *Right Stuff* Chuck Yeager, that he would be seventy-four years old then. He quietly bored into me with those smiling, kindly, but now laser-sharp eyes and said, "What's your point?"

That was my first lesson in ageism. The seasoned veteran instructing the young buck, saying that age is a number and that's all. I kept in touch with Chuck Yeager, did several more physical exams on him, and derived a great deal of pleasure in hearing that he did indeed fly faster than sound on the fiftieth anniversary of the first time. And he did it again on the fifty-fifth anniversary, and on the sixtieth and, most recently, at the age of eighty-nine, on the sixty-fifth anniversary. This remarkable man helped me break some of my own barriers.

In 1995, after four years at the Air Force Surgeon General's Office in Washington, DC, as the chief flight surgeon of the Air Force and after a total of twenty-three years of service, I left the military to join a large healthcare system that wanted to develop a world-class prevention capability. Three years later, the CEO gave me feedback that provided me an "aha" moment. She told me that preventive efforts were highly successful but *were hurting revenue*. After twenty-three years in the military system that incentivized staying healthy—highly trained aviators were a key resource, and were the multimillion-dollar aircraft they flew—it was difficult to conceive of a negative side to prevention. I went home for the weekend deflated. Was there no place where there was incentive to keep people healthy other than in the military or the highly socialized countries of Europe and Canada? That Sunday evening my phone rang. It was my brother Larry calling.

He had been to Mayo Clinic recently and by chance met a former Air Force colleague of mine, Dick Richard Hickman. In the course of their conversation, Dick Hickman talked about some of our assignments together and Larry began to think that I might be interested in helping older adults stay healthy and performing at their best, just as I had done with aircrew. He was calling to ask me to join the Healthy Aging Working Group that very weekend. I jumped at the chance.

## The HAWGs begin

When Larry had asked Dr. Bob Kahn to be a part of the Healthy Aging Working Group, Bob asked "Why are you doing this?"

Larry's answer? "Well," he said, "it's kind of self-serving."

This answer was good enough for Dr. Kahn. It went to the heart of the goal: to help all older adults, in fact, *all people*, to age in a better way. When Larry asked me to join, I was looking for commitment from him. I wanted to apply the research findings of successful aging in order to change public policy. I felt, and Bob Kahn knew, that to influence the lives of a few was a noble enough goal, but to influence public policy was to have a more widespread effect that would endure over generations.

Turns out I was not alone in these big dreams. And so it was that this unlikely mix from academia, senior living, and private consulting—with collective expertise in psychology, medicine, gerontology, nursing, exercise physiology, sociology, strategic planning, business administration, and marketing—

took the momentous step forward to volunteer to change our myopic views of aging ... and to do the right thing. The members of the Healthy Aging Working Group called themselves “HAWGs” and set out cautiously, in late fall of 1999, to explore what could be done to bring research to reality, to help older adults age successfully, as defined by the MacArthur Study and the book *Successful Aging*.

It was clear from the beginning that Dr. Kahn would be the guiding force. Over eighty years of himself, he had the professional and personal experience, the academic credentials, a remarkable ability to articulate complex ideas, and a keen intelligence that was both comforting and challenging for the group. From the beginning, he insisted that, although it would be difficult to measure the effect of any interventions, since this was social—rather than clinical or experimental—research, it was absolutely necessary for us to try. He also insisted on piloting (or beta testing) whatever approach was developed before proposing it as a widespread lifestyle intervention. Larry and the group agreed. We would make all the difference.

## Masterpiece Living takes shape

The MacArthur Study findings were clear: 70 percent of the physical difference and 50 percent of the intellectual difference between those who age in the usual way and those who aged more successfully was due to lifestyle—the choices we make every day. Those aging in a better way—successfully—exhibited and maintained three key behaviors or characteristics:

1. High mental and physical function
2. Low risk of disease and disease-related disability
3. Active engagement in life<sup>1</sup>

Rowe and Kahn, in fact, defined successful aging as the ability to maintain these three characteristics.

In a nutshell, we wanted to get people excited about living a life characterized by these traits. Our hypothesis was that if they did, it would result in a better aging experience, closer to my vision of aging like an autumn leaf. Our first task was to develop tools that would have multiple purposes: first, to allow us to assess the current lifestyle of any individual; second, to allow us to provide feedback to that individual in order to educate and motivate each to modify lifestyle as needed; and last, to provide aggregate measurement capabilities to assess the impact of our approach. We worked much like a trainer: evaluating current status, providing feedback, assisting in the development of an improvement plan, and clearly demonstrating outcomes.

So, our initial approach, now called Masterpiece Living, consisted of six steps: (1) educate older adults on the research findings and what indeed was possible, (2) give them the opportunity to take the Lifestyle Inventory (an assessment of their current lifestyle), (3) provide feedback, (4) discuss the feedback in a one-on-one or group session with a lifestyle coordinator, (5) foster empowerment with a true coaching relationship, and (6) repeat the Lifestyle Inventory in a year. After nearly two years of intermittent meetings and prolonged discussions, it was time to pilot our approach. Would it work? Would older adults be willing to take the Lifestyle Inventory? Would the feedback motivate them to make changes? Would the likelihood of their aging in a better way change over a year?

## A movement

We were eager to find out the answers, and find out we did. (The details of our pilot studies, further

development, and eventual dissemination of Masterpiece Living is detailed in [chapter 18](#).) The approach worked, and worked effectively. Older adults responded to the education, information, and attention and became avid and informed consumers of how they spent their time and how they lived their lives, and as they did, their risks for impairment plummeted. We spent several more years refining our tools, and we expanded our focus more and more on developing resources to transform the *environment*, the community itself, into places where people were stimulated to age in a better way. This involved high-level and sophisticated training, for we were dealing with environments that were the products of another time, when aging was about decline and the focus was on comfort, security, and care. Now, they were becoming centers for healthy aging, destinations for older adults who wanted to become the very best they could be.

In 2007, we felt that Masterpiece Living was ready. We knew we were not done refining it—in fact, we would never be done—but it was time to affect more lives, time to move out to more communities. Our journey from a taxicab ride with Jonas Salk to a validated approach to successful aging may have been a long one, but we were certain it had not been wasted time. We were part of a rising movement to change aging, to make aging the rich, vital, and rewarding experience it can be.



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# PART I

## A NEW LOOK AT HEALTH, CHANGE, AND AGING

**Authentic:** true to one's own personality, spirit, or character.<sup>1</sup>

Before we can deal with how you are aging, before we can look to the future, yours and ours, we must first go back in time ... way back. Because, as much as we like to think that we're all unique individuals (and we are), we have much—enormous amounts in fact—in common. This can be both alarming and comforting, but it's nonetheless true. We must understand the source of that commonality and, understanding it, use that understanding to make our journey to better health and aging a more valuable and productive experience.

As we look to our ancestors to explain our commonality, please note that I am not advocating in any way a return to a pre-Industrial Revolution society. What I am advocating is an awareness of what we need to be healthy and age well, and that we begin to creatively reintroduce these authentic human elements into our individual lives and into our society.



# WHERE ARE WE NOW? HOW DID WE GET HERE?

*Every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

We are a marvel. Many trillions of cells all functioning as one magnificent being. Short, tall, male, female, dark, light, blue eyes, brown eyes, happy, morose, athletic, intellectual, quick, slow—we are human, *Homo sapiens*, “knowing man,” the only living species in the *Homo* genus. Our ancestors who most looked like us originated in Africa about 200,000 years ago. If we go back further, to ancestors who looked more like our primate cousins (the DNA of these current cousins is 98 percent identical to ours), it’s four to eight million years ago. And if we consider other mammals that may not look like us but with whom we share much—from how we procreate and nurture our offspring to how we respond to threats—well, now we’re talking several hundred million years.

Max Delbrück, the Nobel Prize–winning biophysicist, tells us that any living cell carries with it the experience of a billion years of experimentation by its ancestors. These ancestors gave us much more than a family tree. The very things that make us distinctly human were unknowingly tested and perfected by them. The successful ones passed down that success to us. How our hearts and brains and lungs and kidneys and guts work, how our bodies respond to certain foods, how we learn, what we need to feel secure and thrive—all these things were refined by our ancestors and passed down to us. These are our *authentic* traits, in other words, the ones that are truly human, forged by eons of our species’ history, shared by all of us, and durable over time despite marked changes in how we live today. You might say our ancestors worked out the bugs and that we are the prize of all those millions of years of trials: a complex, thinking, adaptable and rational being who dominates the world.

And we do dominate the world, right? Sure, our brains and our ability to manipulate our environment allow us to push our weight around and walk with a swagger amongst our fellow creatures. However, we humans can get a bit carried away with ourselves. Jonas Salk saw our existence in perspective. “If all the insects were to disappear from the earth,” he said, “within fifty years all other forms of life would end. But if all human beings were to disappear from the earth within fifty years all other forms of life would flourish.” As we have developed the tools to better evaluate the cognitive and emotional capabilities of our fellow mammals, especially primates, we are finding that many higher-level skills and social interactions are not unique to us humans.

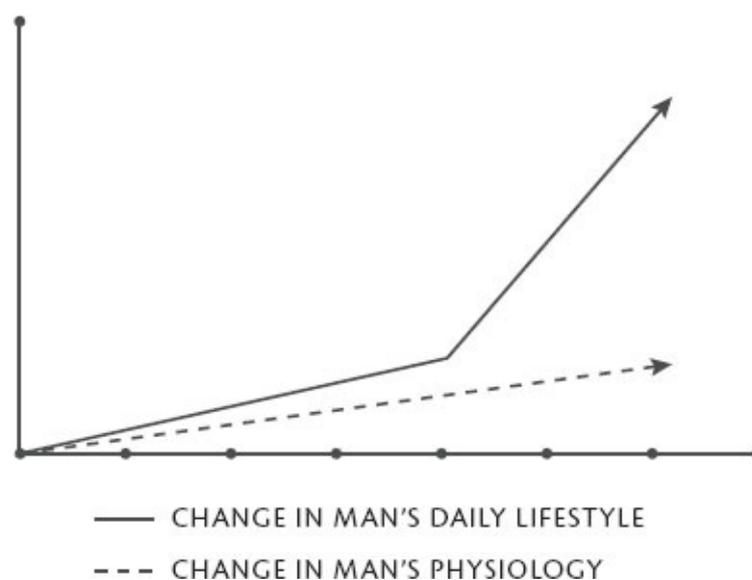
Still, consumed with ourselves or not, we are indeed a masterpiece. A being able to communicate complex ideas, to build cities and washing machines and airplanes and space stations and iPads, to write books, to discover the human genome, to invent bubble gum; the tip of the earth’s pyramid of living things; the final product of a very long assembly line of trial and error, success and failure, and system refinement. But there’s a catch.

With these superpowers we have transformed the earth. In just the blink of a geologic eye, we have moved from caves to skyscrapers, from walking to Segways, from combing the earth for roots and

berries and nuts to McDonald's, from spears to nukes, from conversation to texting, from gazing in a fire to multitasking. The speed of that change has been something the earth has never seen before and it is ever accelerating.

Yet our bodies are slackers when it comes to this rate of change. Our physiologic systems do not change that quickly. What we require to be healthy and flourish is not very different from what our ancestors required. We are essentially a 2.0-version human in the 10.0 world we have created. This is readily apparent when we attempt to explain why we are captivated by campfires, storytelling, and even drum circles; why green is a color that soothes us; why we crave to be part of a group and yet are suspicious of strangers; why we are fascinated by animals; why loud noises still startle us and a walk in the woods relaxes most of us. In 1979, René Dubois, in the introduction to Norman Cousins' *Anatomy of an Illness*, wrote, "Even under the most urbanized conditions, we retain the genetic constitution of our Stone Age ancestors and therefore can never be completely adapted."<sup>1</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, calls us "analog creatures in a digital world."<sup>2</sup>

This failure of our bodies to adapt at the same rate as we have developed our civilization has resulted in a maladaptation, particularly in areas of health and behavior. This maladaptation has our bodies functioning in a "foreign" world, has our bodies and minds desperately seeking what they need to be healthy and functioning at their best but finding it more and more difficult in a world rapidly moving away from the one our ancestors adapted to eons ago. Joan Vinge, author of the award-winning *The Snow Queen*, tells us that "humans are upsetting a fragile balance that their own human ancestors established."<sup>3</sup> Jared Diamond, UCLA professor and renowned author of *Collapse* and *Guns, Germs and Steel*, writes in his latest book, *The World Until Yesterday*, "In some respects we moderns are misfits: our bodies and our practices now face conditions different from those under which they evolved, and to which they became adapted."<sup>4</sup> And Robert Wright, an evolutionary psychologist, states in his compelling book *The Moral Animal*, "We are not designed to stand on crowded subway platforms, or to live in suburbs next door to people we never talk to, or to get hired or fired, or to watch the evening news. This disjunction between the contexts of our design (our ancestral environment) and of our lives is probably responsible for much psychopathology, as well as much suffering."<sup>5</sup>



# The way we were

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We've all heard it, from our grandparents, or parents, or two old gentlemen talking on a bench. It usually starts out with "In my day, we ..." and you can fill in the rest.

"In my day, we walked to school in snow up to our waist," one says.

The other responds, "We didn't even have boots for our feet."

And the final word: "Feet? You had feet?"

It's a caricature, yes, but tales of tougher times are not far-fetched when it comes to our ancestors who lived millennia before us. Remember, these are the ancestors from whom we've inherited most of our physiology, instincts, needs, likes, and dislikes that we think are our own preferences but that are in fact the result of a long history of survival and necessity. So we wonder. How was the life of our ancestors different from ours? Does it matter?

It has only been about ten generations, 250 years, since the Industrial Revolution began to change our world drastically. For four hundred generations before that, approximately ten thousand years, we lived primarily in agricultural societies where we pretty much stayed put, raised crops, domesticated animals, and reaped a dividend of a higher survival and overall quality of life. But for perhaps as much as *72,000 generations or more* before that, we were hunter-gatherers. When our distinct human characteristics were developing, we were essentially nomadic and tightly bound in small groups and villages. Put another way, if all of the time humans have been on earth was one year, the Industrial Revolution would have occurred in the last hour of the year, our agrarian period would be less than *two days*, and the hunter-gatherer period would be 363 days! Can we be so arrogant as to think that what we are today, psychologically, physically, instinctually—and what we need to be healthy, happy; what we need to age well—was determined in the last few centuries? In the last few decades? In the last few years? Or weeks? Clearly the environment in which our ancestors lived had a huge impact not only on them but also on modern-day humans, their relatively recent offspring.

So it becomes crucial to our own understanding of who we are and what we need to be healthy and age well that we break out the human family photo album and carefully look at the environment of our esteemed ancestors. What was life like for these hunter-gatherers? What food did they eat? How did they spend their days? What behaviors allowed them to survive and eventually bring us into existence? What were the conditions under which we humans became who we are?

## **A Day in the Life of Your Great (Times Many Thousands) Grandfather**

He rose with the sun that brought light and heat to the day. There was no time, only the passing of the light, full moons, the repetition of seasons, and the birth and death of living things around him. That was the nature of things, and he was at peace with it. He stoked the embers from last night's fire with added wood from the pile the children had gathered, and brought flames to life. The tribe was already rising with him. There was work to do. If they had been successful finding food in yesterday's light, they all gathered and ate the rewards: the nuts, berries, fruits, and wild vegetables. One of the children had found the carcass of a dead deer, and a group of other children had collected what the predator and birds had left. That was a treat they had all enjoyed by last night's fire while the child proudly told the story of finding it.

As the sun arced over the sky, your ancestor and most of the others walked, looking for food. Since they were traveling farther and farther for food, they would soon move the shelters again. The light was getting short, it was getting colder, and they would move to the place where there were small animals and more roots, and shelter from the winds.

Most of his children had lived and he liked watching them contribute more to the tribe. They were

raised by the entire tribe and responded to all who guided them, particularly the older women. The mothers had all lived through childbirth also and were some of the strongest walkers and most successful food finders and gatherers in the tribe.

When an event happened to one of them, it was recognized by all: a birth, a death, a rite of passage, the discovery of a better food area, good weather. They came together and would often sing and dance as a group. The group was the most important thing. Whatever your ancestor could do that would help the tribe, the whole group, that was what he must do. He remembered from his childhood a man who'd been exiled for hoarding food during a meager time. He would never do such a thing.

After spending all the light time walking and gathering food, he looked forward to being with everyone else around the fire, hearing stories of the old and young, but particularly the stories of the elders. He was close to being an elder himself, and tried to learn as much as possible from the current elders so that he could tell the stories of their history and keep the tribe safe and thriving when they depended on him for guidance. He had learned to observe: to notice any changes in the behavior of their brother and sister animals, fish, and birds that might indicate a threat or availability of food; to watch the clouds, winds, and temperatures to predict storms. He was one of the most successful in the tribe at finding food. He could build or find shelter whenever the tribe needed it. These were the skills that were most important for the survival of all, and he was respected by all and would never let the tribe down.

## A Peek into Our Past

We can get more than a speculative view of the hunter-gatherer environment through the observations of anthropologists like Hugh Brody and Marjorie Shostak, both of whom lived in current-day hunter-gatherer societies. Brody, a writer, anthropologist, and filmmaker, lived with the Inuit in the Arctic and with the salmon-fishing tribes of the Canadian Northwest. In his book *The Other Side of Eden*, Brody dispels myths of hunter-gatherer societies as primitive and brutish, nomadic in the sense that they were never connected to place: "The thing about being with the Inuit is that you have a sense of being with the most gracious, most generous, most sophisticated of human beings. So far from being simple, they are very, very rich and complex." Likewise, he describes their culture as respectful to both the planet and its people. Rather than having a drifter mentality, "hunter-gatherers are completely committed to one place because their success depends on their knowledge of the one place and the knowledge is not transferable."<sup>6</sup>

Marjorie Shostak lived with the !Kung San people of the Kalahari Desert in southwestern Africa and focused on the status of women in this hunter-gatherer society, concluding that !Kung San women had higher status and autonomy than women in Western cultures because of their food contributions. Rather than describing primitive people, the observations of these authors give us a rich look into our human mirror and help us understand why we are the way we are. What it is, in fact, that makes us human. Whether we can attribute the characteristics of modern-day hunter-gather populations to our distant ancestors might be debatable, but I believe most would concede that they are culturally very closely connected to our ancestral past as any other group of humans currently living.

Even a cursory review of the literature about current hunter-gatherer cultures leads one to make some general conclusions that are both surprising and revealing.

Hunter-gatherer cultures ...

- are egalitarian, with women having social equality with men
- are happy, with people laughing freely
- are nonviolent

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