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## First, An Apology

You may, perhaps, have noticed the odd technical glitch recently :-(  
My abject apologies, I know how frustrating such events can be.  
We are working on improvements to the web site (hopefully you

have seen the speed increases) and have done a number of updates that are now mostly complete. Some of the glitches have been from one of our providers, but nonetheless, I carry the can.

My apologies. I hope you'll stick with me and keep letting me know when things are awry.

Web Books Blog

# I've Seen the Old and They Are Us

The summer I was sixteen I got a job in a nursing home in La Jolla, the posh part of my hometown. The nursing home looked elegant, with crystal chandeliers in the lobby. But it smelled horrible, like urine with an overlay of perfume. I worked for the woman who ran the café that served coffee and snacks to visitors. I was in the café most of the time, but one hour each afternoon my job was to bring around a juice cart for the residents. There was the jovial woman who laughed about her "little burps." She had terminal bowel cancer and was actually bringing up the contents of her intestines—and had just enough dementia not to know it. Her doctor could not understand how she was alive, much less walking around making jokes. There was the tiny woman with the white beard who beckoned me over to her wheelchair and motioned for me to bend over so she could whisper in my ear. "Call the doctor," she said, "I'm dead." And countless others, most of whom needed help drinking their little cup of juice. Teenage me could barely stand to assist them.

At sixteen I was sure those nearly-ghosts had nothing to do with me. They were so unlike me that it was easy to dismiss them as not quite human. I'll be 72 next month and the distinction is no longer clear. I see

my life now as a continuum not a binary, with all kinds of traits pulling different directions, from growing happiness and improved perspective to a clear diminution of strength and health. Sixteen-year-old me was aghast at the nursing home residents; today I see them as fully human, fully deserving of respect and care.

By now I have lived through my grandmother in her nineties and then my mother in her nineties, each of them gradually fading, each of them determined to enjoy what she could of life right to the end. I'm not ninety but I'm not sixteen either, or thirty, or sixty. This eighth decade is a new season.

The woman I worked for in the nursing home café lost her dad that summer. She could not afford to fly home for his memorial, but could not bring herself to work that week. A few days after she came back, her boss walked into the cafe and fired us both. "We're making a clean sweep," she said. I was glad to go, and with the narcissism I had at sixteen, I didn't even ask my boss if she was alright after losing her dad and then her job in quick succession. I'd like to think I'd be different—more human—now.

I've thought a lot about ageism as a cultural problem, but the ageism I experienced at sixteen was based in real life encounters plus zero empathy. I've also thought about what it takes to counter internal ageism and develop a positive attitude about aging. It was easier to be age-positive in my sixties when I was in great health and felt just as immortal as I did at sixteen. Now I know that the impatient girl I was at sixteen is the same person as the firebrand I was at sixty, the reflective soul I'm becoming, and the near-ghost I will be someday (if I'm lucky enough to live to my nineties). I have seen the old, and they are us.

I'm writing about all this on the balcony of a hotel in Scotland, a place of stone planters full of blooming geraniums. The balcony overlooks a harbor full of sailboats, with islands and mountains in the distance. There are puffy clouds in a blue sky, and the air is clean with just a hint of flowers and a trace of somebody's distant grill. Each season of life yields perfect days and this is one, here, right now. Of all the times in all the places, I could not ask for more than this moment.

To misquote the poet, I walk forth in a shower of all my days, as do we all.

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Keep the pen moving, or the keys clicking.

All the best,

Stella,

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## From the blog this month

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## A Crone's Quest

### Stella Fosse

Fifteen years ago a cyst consumed most of my right ovary. I had it removed. Not long after, I saw a new doctor who looked at my records and said, "I see you are missing an ovary."

"Not really," I said. "I hardly ever think about it."

Nor do I miss my uterus and the other ovary, both of which departed ten years ago. When Nora Ephron said to "cut out all the things—people, jobs, body parts—that no longer serve you," she could have been talking about my uterus.

A breast, though, is not like those tucked-away body parts. It's right upfront, a visible reminder of babies (and of lovers).

In 2024 a mammogram showed a line inside a mammary duct that might have been just a harmless calcification or might contain a carcinoma. I went through the [Watchful Waiting](#) phase (see my essay from back then, [Schroedinger's Breast](#)) because I knew that even if it

## What You Don't Know

### Beverly Burch

Life slows down, just a little. Family and work aren't as demanding. More time, more space, and you might [discover yourself again](#). It's a journey. There are definitely left turns, some detours, sometimes a one-way street, on the road to back to yourself, but each brings possible discovery.

A therapist for many years, I've also long been a writer—seven books and counting—but I'd never written a novel until now. Finally I closed my private practice and gave myself more time. With that time (and desire!), I found a fuller voice. As always, I write women's stories.

Narratives, stories, they're our first love. Every child begs, "Tell me a story." We live on stories, we make stories about our lives, and they change as we change. And really, older women tell the best stories.

My own story grew about who I loved, who I knew and wanted to know, where I went. My novel's plot, not surprisingly, centers

was a Ductal Carcinomas In Situ (DCIS), half of them [never amount to anything](#). The catch is, nobody can predict which ones of this tumor type will grow (If men had this problem, I'm convinced somebody would have developed a predictive test long ago). My next mammogram showed the calcification had doubled in size.

Next step was a biopsy. I walked in knowing there was some evidence that core needle biopsies can [seed new tumors](#). What I didn't know then was that [biopsy technique makes a difference](#). And I had no warning that my biopsy at a North Carolina teaching hospital would be performed by an unskilled medical student, with minimal pain relief and maximum bruising. I'd never had a biopsy before and thought they were all like that (Even so, I complained about it in my [newsletter](#).)

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around a woman's struggle with change in herself and her loves. It takes a while to get where she was headed all along, to know what she always knew. Yes, it does sometimes.

## The Creative Turn

Even more surprising, our brains turn out to be more creative than ever. It's true! Neurological studies show the brain's wiring, so to speak, is actually more fully connected than ever; it possesses more creative ability. We don't see with just a zoom lens any more; now we also have a wide-angle lens. Now we can see more of the connections between things and can make new discoveries. This is the engine of creativity.

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Stella Fosse



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