

## Three Things that Matter Most in Youth and Old Age by Nancy Hill

In a world that daily throws both curiosities and crises at us, it can be difficult to discern what is important. An unexpected event can render what matters today insignificant tomorrow. How do you keep perspective?

I turned to two groups—children under seven and adults over 70—to explore this question: What is important?

Children, I reasoned, have relatively little to clutter their lives, and in that simplicity they might be able to hone in on what really matters. Adults with more than seven decades of experience would have deep insight into what is most worthy of attention.

I expected to find patterns and did. What people left out was as telling as what they included. No one named prestige or individual success, and hardly anyone mentioned money.

And there was this surprise:

We live among such remarkable people, yet few know their stories.

When I began the project, I didn't know enough people over 70 to create a body of work, so I put a notice in a senior newspaper requesting participants. The response was immediate. And amazing. I met two Holocaust survivors, a woman who had been imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp, a community health nurse who had worked with the Black Panthers, a man with an IQ in the genius range who spent his career working with special needs kids. I met a "Jane," the name given to all women who worked with an abortion clinic in Chicago before *Roe v. Wade*, and I photographed a former attorney involved in legislation that allowed abortion under some circumstances for the first time. One woman ran her first half marathon at 79. One gentleman created one of Oregon's first vineyards.

We live among such remarkable people, yet few know their stories. Why do we show such little appreciation for people beyond a certain age? Policy and decision makers rarely seek their advice. Their faces do not grace the cover of magazines. It is unlikely their stories will show up in a Google search.

I came away from this project with my own list of what's important. At the top of that list is the importance of connecting with others in general, but in particular with those who have lived long lives. Do not let these people disappear quietly into their homes. Draw them out, engage them in conversation, and learn from them.

What three things matter most to you? Tell us in the comments below!

Magdaleno Rose-Avila (Leno)

Born to immigrant parents, Leno was one of 12 children. He began working in Colorado's onion fields when he 11 and later became deeply involved in workers' rights. He worked with Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers and in the Chicano movement of the 1960s and '70s. Together with Sister Helen Prejean, he founded The Moratorium Campaign.

Lucca, 6

Alex Panasenکو

Alex was separated from his Russian family (which was living in Germany at the time) and sent to a German work camp when he was 10 years old. He was released a year later with no idea where his family was. He survived by selling things on the black market. As an adult, he taught Advanced Placement science in a Berkeley, California, high school. He served in the Korean War.

Nia, 6

Frank Thompson

Frank spent 30 years as a prison warden. Two Oregon death row inmates were executed during his years at the Oregon State Penitentiary. He is now a board member for Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

Pippi, 7

Starr Farrell

Star, a cancer survivor, is a former community health nurse who worked with the Black Panthers.

Carson, 5

Nancy Sims

Nancy spent her career in hospital administration. She ran her first half marathon at 79 and is an avid kayaker.

Colton, 6

Judith Arcana

Judith, a writer and activist, was a Jane, a member of the Chicago underground service that helped more than 11,000 women get safe illegal abortions before Roe v. Wade. She holds a Ph.D. in literature and has taught in high schools, colleges, and libraries. She has authored nine books, and her essays and poetry have appeared in numerous anthologies and other publications.

Indiana, 7

Akhila Mudigonda

Akhila spent her childhood and most of her adulthood in India. She now lives in the United

States. She suffered a stroke several years ago, but she still makes clay sculptures of religious figures and animals.

Orrin, 6

Grant Tetsuka

Grant was born and raised in Hawaii, settling on the mainland as an adult. He attended college on a GI bill and was a teacher for 40 years. Retired now, he makes frequent trips to Oregon to visit his grandchildren.

Payton, 6

Hattie Lechlitner

Hattie is the mother of five children and twelve grandchildren.

Avayah, 4

Lillian Tetsuka

Lilian was born and raised in Hawaii. In addition to raising her children, she was an executive secretary. She and her husband Grant (seen above) make frequent trips to Oregon to visit grandchildren.

Michael, 6

Ann Teresi

Ann is a gourmet cook who often prepares huge pots of soup for the residents of the apartment complex where she lives.