

Why bother you with the story of my life, says Black Elk (intro. to B.E.SPEAKS) unless it is the story of all two-leggeds and four-leggeds and winged ones instead of only the story of one turning white with many winters? This Amerind sense of our belonging to the ecosphere--my growing awareness of and agreement with this sense--provides me with a reason for sharing my life-story, a reason in addition to all the obvious ones. Here are my nine decades, in reverse:

LATE MATURITY, ending in death early in the 3rd millenium since our Lord's brief life on earth. My genes on both sides prophecy a gradual loss of control toward the end of this ninth decade, though not including incontinence. Though I'm always going up (in Hartshorne's dipolar sense of contributing to God's riches), I don't anticipate going down and out till about age 90--though of course I may. Though I wouldn't particularly mind, since I've gone everywhere I wanted to go and done everything I've wanted to do (except write a lasting hymn) and have everything I want to have (of both relations and things) and experienced everything I've wanted to experience. Except for body-mind intimations of mortality, which cannot but increase with the passing of winters, I am in the personal condition the Bible describes as *shalom* (no longer having to earn my "vine and figtree," and having power\* to protect them as mine). As I am already "with the Lord," I can't quite bring myself to agree with Paul that it would be "far better to depart and be with the Lord" (2Cor.5.8), since I'm not yet doing much "groaning" in this "tent"--not yet, but I'm now only in my seventh decade.

MIDDLE MATURITY, which could be my most productive if my knees hold out--or even if they don't. I am so wise already: think how much moreso I'll be two decades from now! (I.e., wise in comparison with how dumb and foolish I was earlier in life: as my father the judge used to say, "In comparison with what?"). In his eighth decade, my father went regularly to the bank directors' meetings, where all were in their 8th or 9th decade and greeted each other with "Hello, ghost"--a grave humor they all delighted in, as a what-the-hell acceptance of aging.

EARLY MATURITY, my seventh and present decade, will probably turn out to have been--except for its first two years--a blue-lagoon *shalom* period. Reflection will, I think, conclude that the outstanding feeling of these twenty years was freedom from institutional symbiosis: none of my extensive relationships with institutions will have been longterm contractual or money-compelled. Pushing 64, I am living in marital bliss with my first and only wife; and our children, though of the babyboom generation, are employed. If one calls the three stages of life as being on the make, take, and give, God has led me all the way to being on the full-time give--i.e., volunteerism, the most delicious form of human activity except sex and tennis. Two stages ago, I was on the make, and would have felt a tug upon reading this book-subtitle: "For People on the Way Up." But a few weeks ago, when I read those words, I said to the clerk, "If it weren't for this subtitle, I might buy this book. But I'm not on the way up: actually, I'm on the way down." It was an insensitive thing to say to a clerk at 4.50pm, nothing on her mind but 5pm; and she stared at my blankly, then tittered. I have news for anyone at this moment in range of my mouth, anyone still on the way up: being on the way up is good, being on the way down is better. One stage ago, I was on the take: I still had to earn a living by hiring myself out to institutions. It was good, and I thank God for all institutions that ever put up with this difficult employee. But being on the give is better, as our Lord says it's better to give than to receive; and I am now free to give myself to causes and institutions--such as the C.C. Community Council--that can't afford to pay (though I expect institutions that can, to).

LATE ADOLESCENCE, my sixth decade, was in theological education: N.Y.Theol.Sem.

MIDDLESCENCE, my fifth decade, was in the UCC national office.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE, my fourth decade, was in a pastorate: Morton (Ill.) Comm.Ch. Three struggles stand out: radical social stands, completing a second doctorate, and replacing--on the same site!--a decrepit and space-inadequate old building.

LATE CHILDHOOD, my third decade, was in postcollege ed. and in college teaching.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD, my second decade, was puberty, two conversions, and college.

EARLY CHILDHOOD, my first decade, was advantaged WASP, civil-religious.

\*Decreasing power, given national and world conditions.