CHAPTER TWELVE

Retirement

Men and women who find their work uncongenial, too burdensome or too exhausting, often long for the day they will be able to retire—hopefully with a pension. There are others who are eager to begin a new kind of life, to move to a different place and/or to devote time to other treasured activities. And there are some who may wish to continue working but, in accordance with the rules of their employment, have to retire when they reach a certain age. What tends to be overlooked is the pain that many—even those who wish to retire—feel at the losses sustained by retirement. The emotional upheaval experienced is often unexpected and tends not to be spoken about, perhaps because it is embarrassing to admit that one feels ambivalent about retiring when everyone expects you to feel happy at gaining freedom from the burden and restrictions which work imposes. Moreover, being of an age that leads to retirement inevitably makes one aware of becoming old.

In Western society, we define ourselves and are defined by others to a large extent by the work we do. One of the first questions many people ask when they are introduced to each other is: "What do you do for a living?" To have to say: "I am no longer working, I am retired" may feel as if one is no longer an interesting person. As work takes up the

greatest part of most people's waking hours, retirement brings about a very major change and poses questions. How will I spend my days? What do I want to do? What do I need to do? How will I spend the rest of my journey through life? Many people do not prepare themselves for their retirement, some have vague ideas about their future, few have well thought-out plans. Retirement can be a dangerous time for workaholics who have used work as a defence against inner turmoil; they may break down mentally or, more often, physically once they have stopped working.

Some immediate reactions following retirement

I remember feeling full of joy and gratitude on the day after my retirement party. I wanted to phone everyone who had been there to thank them for having given me such a wonderful, memorable, fun-filled farewell. I had already thanked them but still felt I wanted to do so again. Yet later I wondered whether this urge to be in touch with all the people concerned was prompted by the fear that, from now on, the contact I had enjoyed with so many others might cease. When one of my colleagues told me that she had been asked to chair a new project, it brought home to me that I was no longer eligible for such a task. Nor was I any longer in the position to influence the development of the training courses or the future of the organisation.

The following morning, I awoke thinking that in my leaving party speech, I had omitted to say how important the sense of belonging, being part of the Tavistock Clinic, had been for me. At that time, the Tavistock ideals were, to a great extent, my professional ideals. It was my work-home and now I had lost this place that had been so much part of my life. I had lost the professional community, daily interactions with colleagues, stimulating meetings with them as well as with students. I had welcomed the students' questions, for they helped me to clarify my own thinking, and to witness the students' development was a great joy. All these losses were only beginning to hit me now. I had denied them before, stressing to myself and in conversation with others that, as I was going to continue doing at least some bit of work at the Clinic, I was not really leaving. But being a "visiting teacher", not an inherent part of the core group, not part of its daily pulsating, stimulating lifeblood, not involved in shaping its future, was very different from the position I had hitherto held. It was immensely sad to fully face that I had to give up so much of what had been important to me. I also sorely missed having a specific room to work in and a secretary to help me! I had to let go of my possessiveness of "my Tavistock", to face my envy of those younger than myself taking over. I realised that I needed to turn inwards and outwards, to try to discover what I still wanted to achieve, consider what was still possible for me to do as well as keeping up past connections and hoping to develop new ones. But at that moment these were ideas that carried little conviction of being achievable. Although I had plenty to do—and knew how fortunate I was to be able to continue with a bit of my work at the Clinic as well as my private practice and some teaching in other countries—I felt a deep sense of loss.

A colleague told me that she was going to leave her job some months before she reached retirement age. It made her feel it was her decision rather than that she was being made to leave because of age. She felt gratified when her colleagues expressed their appreciation of the contribution she had made to the work of the team and said that they would miss her.

One week after she had left, she went back in order to clear out the papers she had left in the drawers of her consulting room. She was surprised to discover how disturbing an experience it was. Her name had already been removed from the door of her room. It felt as if she had been wiped out! She found it difficult to decide which papers were no longer relevant and should be disposed of and which to keep for further use. While she was engaged in this task, she could hear the voices of other members of staff, assembled in the room next door, discussing their work. She suddenly felt extremely hungry, "starved", had a sore throat and felt generally unwell. Once she left the Clinic, all these symptoms disappeared as suddenly as they had come. It seems that the sorting of papers and feeling excluded from the staff meeting next door evoked a very painful awareness of wanting to hold onto the past, of having to let go of much that she valued—a task we have to undertake at every point of major change. The psychosomatic way she experienced the losses, points to their origins in infancy and childhood. The sound of the voices next door brought home to her that she was no longer enjoying the mental food that they were sharing. It stirred up infantile anxieties of being starved and a childlike longing to sit at the table, sharing the food that the parents and siblings were having. Might the sore throat and feeling ill be physical manifestations of an angry, inner screaming at not being allowed to partake of what the others were enjoying next door? Having to let go of past good experiences had evoked deep-seated feelings of being alone, excluded and separated.

Long-term reactions to losses at retirement, being made redundant, unemployed

Loss of employment

Whether one's work is satisfying in itself or merely a means of earning a living, being employed implies that one is doing something that has value, as evidenced by getting a monetary reward. It means being needed, wanted, and creative in one way or another. Being out of work, retired or made redundant, leaves the person without such reassurance and may result in him feeling useless, superfluous, no longer needed or valued. For some, the job may have carried with it status, prestige, power—all these will now have to be relinquished. In as far as the person needs these external crutches to make him feel important, he may suffer a severe loss of self-esteem. To some extent, we all remain children at heart: wanting to be loved, seeking the recognition, approval, praise of parents, teachers, siblings. Their absence may result in feelings of worthlessness or at least doubts about one's worth. Retirement may feel like being ousted, not wanted, or no longer fit to work. Feeling rejected in turn tends to evoke resentment, jealousy, and envy of those taking one's place and is part of the work of mourning needing to be done at that time.

Loss of structure

Those who have made definite plans for the future may be happy that they can now do what they feel passionate about. For others the freedom they have dreamt of enjoying once they retire often turns out to be double-edged. There is the pleasure at being relieved from the pressures of work, of rigid timetables, of having time-limited holidays. But once one has enjoyed an extended period of rest or holiday, how does one deal with unlimited freedom, the loss of structure of the day and week, the absence of defined tasks and goals? With no outer structure to hold onto, does one have the discipline to use time constructively, creatively, thoughtfully—or is time squandered? When left to choose what to do, does one experience a feeling of emptiness, a lack of purpose, boredom? The very freedom forces the person to confront his inner world, to consider his priorities, what he values and what gives his life meaning. Experiencing being cut off from his work environment, he may feel bereft, lost, without anchor. Retirement is also bound to lead to reviewing what one has achieved, and failed to achieve, in the course of one's life hitherto. Guilt at having neglected what should have been attended to while employed and regret at missed opportunities, are part of such a review. Moreover, one might in the past have attributed not getting on with particular activities to a shortage of time but now discover that one actually lacks the capacity to do them—such as completing a project, playing a musical instrument, painting, writing a thesis, sport of various kinds. All kind of fears, doubts about oneself that were kept at bay while one was busily occupied, tend to surface and can no longer so easily be pushed out of one's mind.

Loss of companionship

In the course of our work, most of us come into contact with a number of people: work-mates or colleagues, secretaries, bosses, clients, customers, patients, caretakers, canteen staff, members of other organisations. With the event of retirement most, if not all, of these work-related social interactions are lost, depriving the individual of the stimulation, interest, and comradeship they had provided. Even some of the irritations, the disagreements, and verbal fights one had might be missed, since they added spice and liveliness to daily life! If he is lucky, the retired person remains in contact with a few of the people who have become friends. If he goes back to visit his former place of work, people may greet him in a friendly manner, be pleased to see him briefly, but he soon realises that they are busy getting on with their own lives, their relationships, their concerns about the work in which he no longer plays a part. It makes him acutely aware of being separate, on his own. Once he accepts that there is no way back, his current social life comes under scrutiny. Are there good friends, close family relationships to make one less bereft of company? If the partner is working, one may be alone all day. The insufficiency or inadequacy of close relationships becomes more apparent. Single people may become more aware of not having a partner to alleviate the loneliness, to communicate, have fun, share worries with, to provide support. If there are no children or grandchildren who come to visit, the silence of the house is more acutely felt.

Married couples may have to face the fact that the largely separate lives they had led while working may have allowed them to avoid difficulties in their relationship. Now that they are spending much of their time together, these become more obvious and harder to tolerate. Can one bear to be with one's partner all day long? Does one share enough

interests? Is there space for privacy? Does one have to account for any time spent out of the house? The whole nature of the relationship undergoes a great change and may put the marriage in jeopardy. Alternatively, the marriage may be strengthened by joint activities, the appreciation of each other's needs, strengths, good qualities, and the support each provides the other; this is often only achieved after a period of tension, irritation at the partner's habits, different tastes, and aims in life.

The spectre of ageing and decline

Retirement is a sharp reminder of approaching old age. One is a pensioner or an "old age pensioner", now often more kindly referred to as "senior citizen". True, there are some advantages attached to this status and one may still feel full of energy, be in good health, and engage in enjoyable activities—perhaps even develop talents which had lain dormant—which there was little time to pursue before. But worries about the future, about ageing, loss about sexual attractiveness and potency, about physical and/or mental decline, easily come to mind. To escape depression, some older men (and women) engage in sexual adventures, preferably with much younger partners, take up new, risky activities, for instance gambling or car-racing, or lead a frenetic life. The future is indeed uncertain. How much time is there left? Will it be a process of gradual, graceful ageing or will one have to suffer prolonged sickness and disability? Will there be anyone who needs us, takes care of us when we can no longer manage on our own or will we be left all alone in an uncaring society? Will we have sufficient financial resources to maintain a reasonable standard of life? Until this point in time, old age and death may not have been seriously faced. Retirement brings all these thoughts to mind and makes us realise that the larger part of our life is over.

Facing the truth that our lifespan is limited may heighten our appreciation of being alive. It may induce a greater feeling of connectedness to nature, to life in all its various manifestations, a greater commitment to do what is in our power to preserve life and care for others as well as for the environment and the kind of world we are passing on to our children and grandchildren.

Case illustrations

Let us look at how three very different individuals struggled with the emotional upheaval aroused by retirement. Brief therapy can be as

helpful at this time as it is at other times of crisis, provided there is no major long-standing history of severe disturbance. The very fact that a life-changing event has stirred up deep-rooted feelings makes them more available to be looked at and worked on. This makes it possible, in even a few sessions, to bring about a better understanding of what the person is going through when he loses the working life he is used to. If the loss is not worked at, it may lead to ongoing depression, illness, or dependency on drugs and alcohol.

Mr. E., a consultant ophthalmologist (eye-surgeon) came to see me a few months after retiring from his hospital work. He developed a serious illness after retirement, so he was now considering cutting down, and eventually giving up, his private practice. He felt very depressed at thinking how empty his life would be without the work he loved. "I have no hobbies, my work is my life," he said. He told me that he was not able to reduce his private work as he had not found anyone suitable to take over his practice. He spoke about this at some length. I wondered whether the difficulty in finding a suitable replacement might in part be due to his reluctance to let someone else take over his work which, as he had told me, was all-important to him. He did not respond to this but instead went on to tell me about his work in the hospital and how difficult the last few months there had been: "I was no longer consulted, my colleagues behaved as if I had already left." At the end, they had given him a grand farewell party; there had been many speeches, praising his skills and achievements. He had no doubt that the compliments were sincerely meant and was aware that his colleagues held him in high esteem. All the same, he experienced them as not sufficiently appreciative of what he had done. This was shown by how they behaved after he had retired; they had acted in ways that deeply hurt him. For instance, he had recently learnt that colleagues who had worked on a research project that he had initiated, had published their findings without ever mentioning his name. He had also heard that certain procedures he had pioneered were no longer being adhered to. I said he felt that his colleagues were no longer acknowledging his contributions—in fact felt free to steal his academic work—nor, by discontinuing to work in the way he had trained them, were they showing respect. I said that I could understand how angry and hurt this must make him feel. But as he went on speaking, I sensed that there was also something beyond these specific, indeed very upsetting, issues: a general feeling of him and his work not being remembered at all, being killed off. So I said that I wondered whether he also resented that his colleagues made changes and

whether he had hoped that what he had discovered and taught should be adhered to, kept alive.

When I saw Mr. E. again, two weeks later, he told me that he had thought a lot about what I had said about wanting to be remembered. He had become aware that he had somehow hoped, even expected, that his work and name would live on, perhaps forever. "I have to learn to be more humble and accept the reality of what I have created," he said. "I know some of it was good and some of it even very good but I suppose all one does is to discover more about the body and all its incredible complexity and one adds just a bit more to our understanding of it. I have been thinking how lucky I was to have had the opportunity of a good education, excellent teachers and to be able to build on knowledge inherited from previous generations." I suggested that he could think of himself in this way too, as a link in a chain, passing on his insights to those who came after him and that something good he had contributed both as a teacher and a physician was not all lost. I said I felt that there had been a big shift in his perspective, from wanting to be so important that nothing was ever to change to feeling himself to be one in a line of those who contributed to the understanding of the human organism, part of an amazingly complex mysterious order that still needed further understanding.

We had three more meetings over the next six months. By then Mr. E. was doing much less work, having found a very able young man to take over his practice. I commented that finding it possible to hand over, letting a younger person come to the fore, was intimately linked to his being able to give up the need to assert that he was irreplaceable. He said he had been gratified to learn that his patients spoke warmly of him, calling him "a human being who cares". I said that the caring help he had given to his patients was a great gift and clearly something they continued to remember and treasure. I asked what aspects of his work he missed most. He said that he liked teaching and research but what he really enjoyed was that while he was dealing with his patients' eyes they talked about their lives; he loved hearing about these.

Having defined that his interest in his patients' lives was so important to him, Mr. E. was able to begin to wonder whether such satisfaction could be found through engaging in some activity which fitted his present circumstances. Within months, he had become deeply involved in visiting and giving advice to residents in old people's homes, reading to those who had gone blind, organising fund-raising events for homes

for blind people, and giving lectures. Feeling part of a group that cared for people provided him with many of the pleasures that had enriched his life before retirement. He also told me that he had started to participate in his wife's artistic activities. He had never done this before. It made him feel closer to her; it was such a different world, one he had never known much about. He had clearly found a new life in which he could use his interest, care, and love of others while being much appreciated. I also believe that the understanding that a caring therapist provides can help a person who feels as low, as uncared for, as unappreciated as did Mr. E., to regain self-confidence. This makes it easier to invest in new activities rather than feel the future is to be a void.

Mr. P. was referred by his doctor who was concerned about his heavy drinking. He was a small, stout man with a protruding stomach. He seemed pleased to have the opportunity to speak about himself although, as he told me, he could not imagine how mere talking could help. This is his story. He had come from a poor but loving family and left school when he was fifteen to become a machine operator in a tool-producing factory. The work was boring but it left him free to talk with those working near him. They exchanged news about sporting events, gossiped about women, about domestic squabbles and the like. He said that he and his work-mates had fun together both on the job and while going for a drink afterwards. He used to come home tired, to have a meal with his wife, would watch television and sometimes go to the pub. His children had long ago left home; he saw them and the grandchildren occasionally. He had got tired as he approached retirement age and had looked forward to stopping work. But once he had left, he found it hard to have nothing to do. The days seemed long and boring. He began staying in bed longer; what was the point in getting up? He felt in the way in his own home, seeing his wife hoovering under his feet or dusting around him, so he went down to the pub in the hope of finding male company. But then he began to drink more, eventually taking some bottles home. His wife had found them hidden in a cupboard. They now had frequent rows, mainly related to the shortage of money and the way he spent so much of their limited income on drink.

I said it all sounded very sad: he seemed to miss having a structure to the day and the companionship of his work-mates, and in addition he seemed to feel a nuisance at home, unable to offer something worthwhile to his wife. "Yes, he said, "I used to come home and tell her the latest gossip from work and she would like that. Now there is nothing

to talk about. I also feel I am no longer useful, my pension is less than I had reckoned it would be. I'm just in her way, a mouth waiting to be fed." I said he seemed to feel guilty at not providing as much money as before, being a burden to his wife, and suggested that he was trying to run away from these painful feelings by going to the pub. When I asked whether he had made any friends at the pub, he replied "Although we joke a lot, the guys I meet there are just like me, bored and miserable." I said he had tried to drown his sorrow in drink but this did not work for long and only made him feel worse afterwards; it led to wanting to blot out his depressed feelings by drinking more and more. I was impressed by him having been able to tell me so clearly what troubled him and wondered whether he might be able to share some of his thoughts with his wife. This idea did not appeal to him at all; it clearly did not accord with his views on what a man, a husband, should be like.

When I saw Mr. P. again, he seemed even more depressed. He had gone to visit his mates at the factory but although they had greeted him in a friendly manner, they had been busy and were chatting about the new manager and new machinery. He realised that they had moved on and he felt himself to be intruding, a hanger-on. Their talk about the firm's impending Christmas party further heightened his feelings of exclusion. Recognising that there was no way back to the past was extremely painful for Mr. P. but it was also the first step in coming to terms with the reality of his position and considering the future rather than trying to escape into drunken mindlessness. I said that I had the impression that his view of himself seemed not to extend beyond being a factory worker and bread-winner. Now that his circumstances had changed, he felt as if he had nothing to offer. He thought about this for a while and then said he was good with his hands and had in the past done some carpentry, perhaps he could take this up again. He left in a thoughtful mood.

When we met again four weeks later he looked less depressed and more neatly dressed. He told me that he had got out his tools and made some shelves for the kitchen. His wife was pleased with them. I said it occurred to me that perhaps he could use his carpentry skills to teach others to do woodwork, perhaps his grandchildren. "No," he said, "we don't see much of them."

At our third meeting, he told me that he had discovered there was a youth club down the road from where he lived. He had gone there one evening and had offered to teach some of the youngsters to make things

out of wood. The youth leader had been very welcoming and he now went there twice a week. He had been asked whether he would befriend two fatherless boys and he had agreed to do so. He liked young people, was happy to help them, and last week he had brought them home and his wife had given them a meal. I commented how his new occupation made him feel that he was doing something worthwhile and was something that gave him much pleasure.

By the time I saw Mr. P. two months later, he had acquired a small allotment. He was growing vegetables and flowers. He had got the two boys he had befriended interested in helping him. He reflected that growing things made him aware of how dependent we are on rain, sunshine, the changing seasons. He had also come to see how much people depend on each other; the boys needed him and he needed them. I commented on his new awareness of the interdependence of human beings as well as man's interconnectedness with nature. He then spoke with great feeling about how flowers grow, blossom, wilt, wither, but not before they have produced seeds which in turn became plants and flowers and take up the space which has become empty. "It all makes sense," he said. I wondered aloud whether what made sense was seeing his life as one of sowing seeds, caring for the environment and the next generation so that they could blossom—and that this also made it possible to accept becoming older and eventually wilting and dying. I was deeply moved by the mental-emotional-spiritual growth of this man who had previously had such a very restricted view of his existence, had seen himself merely as a tool in other people's lives. Now he felt himself to be helping to create, promote, and sustain new life. Being in touch with nature had led to a deep respect for the natural order of growth, blossoming, decline, death, and renewal of life. He knew he was subject to this same life cycle and seemed able to accept that one had to make space for the new generation to flourish.

Miss M. found herself becoming seriously depressed a year and a half after retirement. She had been a lecturer and had enjoyed writing. She had continued to attend professional conferences and on several occasions had been asked to contribute to them. But lately such requests had been sparse and this had made her feel she was no longer wanted. She thought people now felt her to be too old, too out of touch with current thinking to be able to produce anything of interest. Even worse than this was the fact that she herself was dubious about still being capable of doing well. When she was recently asked to give a talk, she had

at first been happy to accept the invitation but then became extremely anxious, wondering whether in fact she still had the capacity to write something new, well thought-out, and to present her paper in a lively enough manner to hold the audience's attention. I commented that she seemed to be anxious that her vitality and mental ability were diminishing. She said that this was her greatest fear. I learnt that her mother, now in her eighty-ninth year, had been a highly intelligent woman but in the last few years had deteriorated physically and mentally. Miss M. was worried about her mother becoming incapable of living on her own and talked to her about moving into an old people's home. This suggestion was, however, met with an absolute refusal. Although Miss M. knew that her mother was very lonely, she rarely visited her because she lived a fair distance away. I wondered whether perhaps she also avoided seeing her because it frightened her to think of herself becoming like her mother. Miss M. said every visit to her mother left her depressed, so she supposed what I said was right.

Miss M. then told me of her interest in antique Chinese paintings. Her mother and father had lived in China for some time and had brought home some beautiful works of art. It was the delicacy of the brush-work and the story they conveyed in such a simple, subtle way which Miss M. particularly admired. She was considering whether to enrol on a painting course. She also wanted to visit China but wondered whether she dared do so. It seemed to me that she was trying to make links with her parents' past life and expressing her appreciation of what they had given her. It emerged that her father had not only loved paintings but also been a gifted amateur painter.

Miss M. did in fact join an educational tour of China. She came back having had a very interesting and exciting time in congenial company. She said she found it hard now to be on her own again. This had made her more aware of how lonely her mother must feel. She had been to see her more frequently, both to share what she had seen and learnt on her trip and to hear more about her parents' life in China. They had looked at old photographs and shared memories of the past. Miss M. had visited some old people's homes but was shocked to see how most of the residents just sat and stared into space. She did not wish her mother to be similarly cut off from life and was going to arrange for her to have more help in order to make it possible to stay in her own home as long as possible. She had also spoken to the headmistress of

her niece's school and asked whether her mother could be on the list of old people that sixth formers visited as part of their community project. She knew her mother would be happy to receive young people and would be stimulated by them. If her mother got frailer, she was considering bringing her down to live in a sheltered flat near her own home. Respect for her parents, identifying with her mother's loneliness in old age, and the wish to make reparation for having neglected her, seemed now to be guiding her actions. She had also made plans for her own life. She decided to enrol both on a painting class and on a Chinese language course. She realised that Chinese was a very difficult language. Learning to speak and write it would be a challenge and keep her mind active. She felt altogether more alive and was looking forward to embarking on these new ventures.

Finding a new, meaningful life

We have seen how the three people described eventually began to reshape their lives in ways that were felt to give them new meaning. The preliminary task was to distinguish between the actual losses sustained at retirement and the anxieties to which these had given rise. In Mr. E.'s case the main fear centred on his work and being forgotten; for Mr. P., feeling himself to be useless, superfluous; Miss M. was afraid of loneliness and losing her mental capacity. These anxieties resulted in depression, a lack of hope and confidence to invest in a new, different kind of life. Having to let go of the past and finding it difficult to invest in the present is characteristic of the work of mourning. Klein (1940) stated that every external loss evokes fear of losing goodness within one's internal world: loving, supporting parents/mentors and parts of the self. Feelings of loss frequently appear in nightmares: losing a brief-case or handbag which contains all one's valuables may possibly be linked to the fear of having lost or losing valuable aspects within oneself. Dreaming of losing keys perhaps may be associated with fears about having lost the key to what is felt to be home, knowledge, and understanding; loss of jewellery may sometimes be associated with the fear of having lost physical/sexual attractiveness. There is no dictionary of "this" meaning "that". It is all a question of what free associations come to the client's/patient's mind in relation to their dreams or actions. It is only when the underlying anxieties and the hopelessness about the loss

are faced and put against the reality of what is still available to do and to enjoy that new strength and hope are able to come to the fore.

Being more aware of our limited lifespan encourages us to consider our priorities and to pursue the goals that we wish to, and can still, achieve, internally as well as in our relationships to others. It may also awaken an interest in our roots and make us appreciate the richness of wisdom we have inherited from previous generations. Being in touch with our vulnerability may bring with it a greater capacity to empathise with and try to help others who are needy and lonely. Acknowledging that we are mortal causes us to feel helpless, infinitely small and unimportant and yet at the same time makes us conscious of the fact that what we do or don't do, and the way we convey our love and concern, makes a difference to other human beings, to the environment, to future generations—as well as, indeed, to the poverty or richness of our own lives. Perhaps surprisingly, living a fulfilling life makes it more possible to accept that we shall one day die.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Growing old and facing death

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances …
… Last scene of all,
That ends this strange, eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

This is the grim picture of old age Shakespeare paints in a monologue from *As You Like It*, sometimes known as the "Seven Ages of Man". It is true, of course, that becoming old raises the spectre of loss of physical and mental abilities, going on existing "without" so much of what one had before. We know that even if we escape severe chronic physical and/or mental illness, our bodily strength will diminish with increasing age; our sight, our hearing, our mobility, our short-term memory is likely to be impaired or possibly lost altogether. We may have to put up with pain and dysfunction of some part or parts of the body. Not only do we have to face our own decline and death but also often that of our partner and, frequently, the loss of our home. But in spite of all this, does old age, even very old age, have to be "sans