

# Life Review

By Lou Flessner & Ned Abenroth

**L**ife Review is a conversation to winnow down the grain of all that you have been, to arrive at the nut of it- the nut of you. It is one way to ascertain as best one can, just what is the nature of this soul-thread, woven throughout your life, that connects your life starting from birth all the way to the present day.

## The Way it Is.

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.

~William Stafford

As such, the work of life review is not a stroll down memory lane, idealizing or romanticizing prior times as the “good old days.” It isn’t done for its own sake. Elders enter their stories as part of their quest of becoming fully alive...which implies one’s living on behalf of the broader world.

Harvesting all that has been catalyzes a clarity for you in this quest...We look back...(and gaze ahead), in order to see clearer right now.

Life review could be done over an entire year or season. Lou Flessner did his while on a multi-month cross-country motorcycle trip through South America. Paul Stoltenberg went about it in part by answering a weekly prompt for an entire year, that eventually was compiled into a book. Tom Cashman tends to life review while holed up in the mountains during his annual solo retreat. I last did mine in my circle while on a 5 day wilderness fast. How detailed and far

you go is entirely up to you. This is very much “layers of an onion” work. The mystery of your story will reveal more gifts of insight, the more time you put in.

As you go, consider picking up some rosemary sprigs to carry with you this month. Throughout history the fragrant herb rosemary has been a symbol of remembrance. In Hamlet, Shakespeare said “There’s a rosemary, that’s for remembrance.” Not for re-living, but for re-membling—a deepening of connection to what has been, as a way to spring forward.

The elders tame  
The beast in their past  
So that the night's hoofs  
Can no longer break the jeweled vision  
In the heart.

The intelligent and the brave  
Open every closet in the future and evict  
All the mind's ghosts who have the bad habit  
Of barfing everywhere.

For a long time the Universe  
Has been germinating in your spine

But only a Sage has the talent,  
The courage to slay  
The past-giant, the future-anxieties.

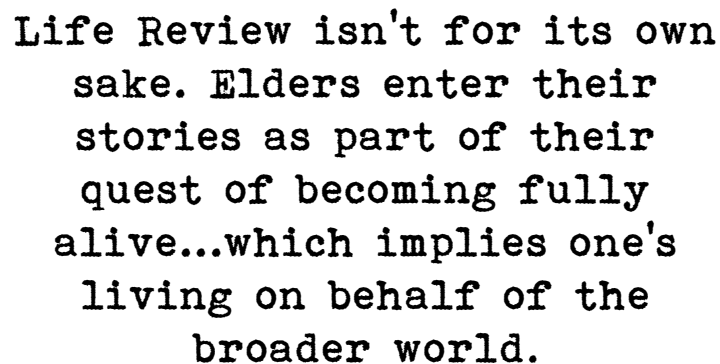
The crone  
Wisely sits in a circle  
With other elders  
Gathering the strength to unmask herself,  
Then  
Sits, giving,  
like a great illumined planet on  
The Earth.

-Adapted from Daniel Ladinsky's interpretation of Hafiz

## Exercise:

There are many ways to do life review so work with approaches that resonate most deeply. There is not right or wrong...tend to this in a way that makes sense for you.

One possibility is working from the small things and moving up: You'll start with the little things, the building blocks of what has been day by day, week by week,



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year by year, grouping them into 7-year increments. Then you'll move to the themes you'll see emerge out of the stuff of your life.

### **The Building Blocks:**

Go through each year of your life, in groups of 7 year increments (yes this will take some time!)...Remember each year...What happened? See if you can get something remembered for every single year of your life. What were the major stories, turning points, people, themes of these years...What feels incomplete? What needs celebrating? Sometimes it might be simply a fragment of a memory or an image more than an event--those are important too!

The first pass, is really tending to "what happened," at a pretty high level. Don't get too stuck in the weeds, consider using bullet points that might represent more detailed versions of stories to unpack later...

After that keep going deeper, tending to what was below, between, and beyond the history of you. Look at what *didn't* happen as much as what did happen. One of Francis Weller's Five Gates to Grief is tending to what we "expected but did not receive." What is evoked by reading your story through this lens?

After you have tended to the particularities of a 7 year season, step back and witness it back as a whole chunk. What was it like to be you in that season? If you were to name each season like a chapter in the book of YOU, what would the title be? Create a title for each 7 year season, and a symbol for each season of life as well.

Once you've tended to the seasons start to look at how each season fits with the others. What do you notice? What threads are started in one and completed in another? What are the transition points that become apparent? Which threads in early life foreshadow seasons in later life? Sit with the questions posed below to the extent they serve you...

Record all your work. Feel free to use the attached sheets, at the end of this document, or your own journal. At the end you will have titles for each chapter and an image/symbol that corresponds with each chapter. What might need to be put on your altar and held?

What themes of your story are spiraling and returning time and again?

# Life Review Notes

Age:

1

2

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4

5

6

7

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

8

9

10

11

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13

14

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

I'm tending to:

Places I feel incomplete...

Moments I was led to repress  
parts of myself

Places I want to celebrate...

That which asks to be grieved...

Major turning points...

Important people...

Places I came alive...

Connections to my larger story...

Wounds to tend to...

Where God showed up...

Age:

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

Title/Image:-----

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Age:

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

Title/Image:-----

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Age:

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Connections to my larger story...

Wounds to tend to...

Where God showed up...

Age:

43

44

45

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48

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Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

50

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56

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

Title/Image:-----

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Age:

64

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68

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70

Title/Image:-----

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Age:

71

72

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Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

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84

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

85

86

87

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91

Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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Age:

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Title/Image:\_\_\_\_\_

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