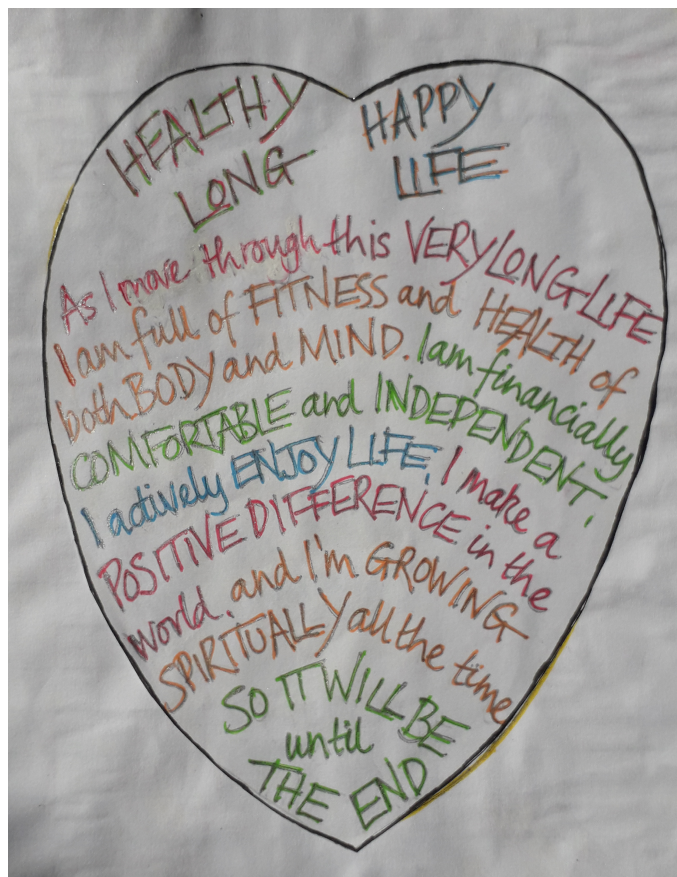


# Healthy, happy, long life.

a permaculture design by Cath Johnstone, July 2017



*This was my second design, now nearly four years old. I started my diploma journey in 2011, and in 2012 moved to Tanzania for what was to be less than two years, but turned into eight. I never really engaged well with the diploma while I was there, so this design happened in a sort of diploma vacuum. There is much that I like about it, and quite a lot that I'm not really happy with. Last year I seriously re-engaged with the diploma process, and decided to publish it. I'm now in the process of a major review of it, which I'm doing as a completely separate design.*

*The write-up below is from the time, edited for clarity and readability, to improve the presentation style, and to shorten it a bit.*

*Cath Johnstone, July 2021*

## INTRODUCTION

I did this design in my early sixties, in response to observations about the emotional space I was in regarding my age, the quality of life of my very elderly father, and the death of my aunt, from Alzheimer's disease. Over the past few years, I'd become quite negative about myself in relation to the aging process. These were my main observations, effectively a client interview with myself:

- I felt unaccepting of changes that I was observing: eg deterioration of eye sight, development of arthritis, more wrinkles and saggy flesh, less energy;
- I was feeling slow, unfit, overweight and lethargic;
- Although I generally have a good diet, I was aware it could be better;
- I noticed that I was using language that reinforce the belief that I am "getting old";
- I was dreading losing my independence, or being incapacitated by degenerative illnesses;
- I was becoming fearful of living in poverty as an old person;
- I noticed that I shared the common basic belief that in old age long term physical and mental degeneration is inevitable, although I knew that in reality this is not the case.

Over the previous couple of years I had (re)started daily meditation, together with some other practices for personal growth. I had already decided to focus those practices on changing my relationship to my age and my future as an older person and started researching different issues relating to healthy aging, and making a number of changes (eg taking some dietary supplements); but I was doing this in a haphazard way. I wanted to apply more focus to the ideas, and decided to do it as a permaculture design.

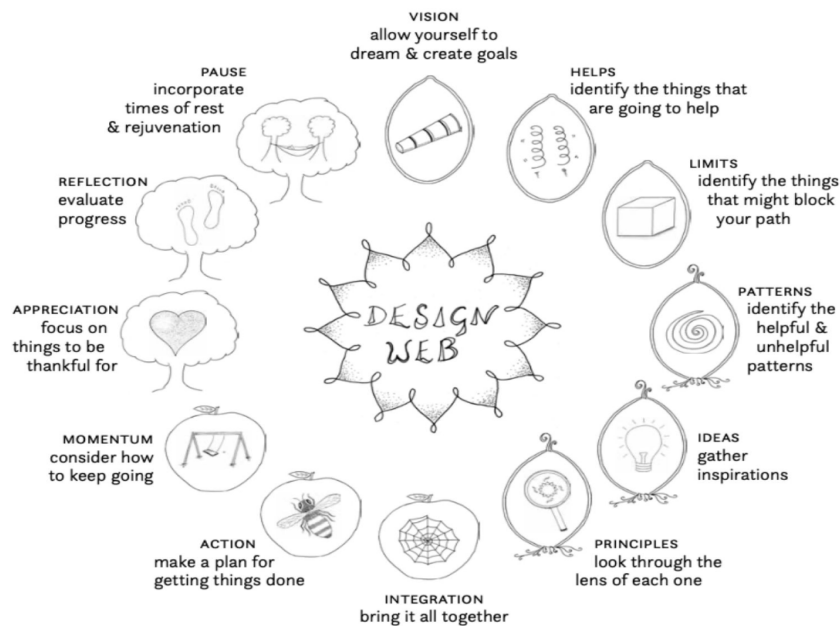
I decided to use the Design Web as my framework; it is intended for non land designs, and it suits my way of thinking to be able to jump back and forth rather than following a linear process. I worked with it in that way, although I record it in a linear way here.

## ETHICS

Primarily this is a People Care design, my main motivation being the desire to give myself the best possible chance of living to an old age healthily and happily, without succumbing to the degeneration that is normally seen as an inevitable part of aging. I was also motivated by wanting not to become a burden to my children or society, to avoid becoming reliant on others.

Earth Care and Fair Shares are implicit in the vision through my aim of making a positive difference in the world throughout my life. These two ethics have been major motivators for most of my life; when I did the design, I was working as a volunteer in Tanzania, East Africa, to help set up a local environmental organisation.

# Design Web



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## THE ANCHOR POINTS

### VISION

I considered the areas of life that I had fear about when thinking about old age, and what were the main elements, for me, of a healthy, happy old age, and created my vision as an affirmation which addressed all these. It's also a sort of design brief. (See picture on the front page.)

### HELPS

I considered what actions and changes to my lifestyle would help me achieve the vision:

- **Examining and improving my diet**, with research into specific dietary interactions for healthy aging; which foods (and supplements) could I add, which should I exclude or limit?
- **Working to remove my resistance to exercise** and to develop a healthier, active lifestyle.

- **Increase mental activity** to promote brain health and resistance to Alzheimer's disease etc;
- **Challenging and changing my negative beliefs and language** about aging. (See more about this in Appendix 1)
- **Finding ways to 'positivise' my attitude to life generally**, to bring more laughter into my life, and to reduce negative states of mind, especially fear (eg of aging, of having no money).
- **Research other aspects of lifestyle** which might be relevant, eg breath, sleep, fasting.

I also considered which of my friends and family might help and enlisted help from those who could offer nutritional or other suggestions, and general encouragement.

## LIMITS

I thought about what might limit my ability to achieve my vision:

- My own resistance to exercise, and to a lesser extent, to change generally.
- Availability of some dietary ingredients and supplements could be an issue.
- Very hot climate and its effect on my desire/willingness to exercise.
- The challenge of making lasting change, keeping motivated.

## PATTERNS

I thought about my patterns of behaviour that could impede progress in the design:

- Eating the menu! (Getting lost in research and ideas and not acting.)
- Resistance (especially to exercise)
- Self sabotage
- Starting enthusiastically and then flagging (conversely I also have the ability to persevere.)

## IDEAS AND INSPIRATIONS

This anchor point was a major part of my design process, leading to much of the research which informed the design decisions. Throughout the process I kept a list of ideas as they occurred to me, for example around presentation of the design, books to read, research to be done, habits to develop, how to support myself in implementing the design. The most relevant are shown in Appendix 2.

## PRINCIPLES

In total I found 13 principles relevant, of which some were more useful than others.



### **Observe and interact**

This principle is at the heart of the design, which is an interaction with my observations about my aging process, and my hopes for my old age. And I recognised the importance of observing my progress through the implementation of the design, making changes as necessary.

### **Value diversity**

This principle reminded me to use a diverse approach to the issue as a whole (ie. not just exercise and diet: also beliefs, language etc), and to the details of the design solutions (diverse forms of physical and mental exercise, of psychological and spiritual practices, etc).

### **Produce no waste**

I looked at where I waste energy and time (eg negative emotions, procrastination, perfectionism) and how they lead to a spiral of erosion (low self esteem >> self sabotage >> lower self esteem) and thought about how to work on those issues through the design.

### **Obtain a yield**

I expected to harvest many yields, starting soon, which were important motivators:

- Physical yields: eg feeling fitter, reduction/loss of joint pain, weight loss, more energy.
- Emotional yields: loss of my fear about aging, a more positive outlook, more peace and contentment, greater emotional freedom.
- New skills (eg making fermented food) and knowledge (eg about diet, healing techniques)
- Unforeseeable yields as a result of being out and about more on the exercise trail

### **Small and slow solutions**

I recognised that if I tried to change too much, too quickly, I would be unlikely to succeed in making lasting change. I would focus on a few interventions each week/month, taking account of which are most urgent, easiest, or most immediately beneficial. I would have to be aware that my sense of urgency might push me to try to do too much too quickly.

### **Integrate rather than segregate**

This was a design for a new(ish) lifestyle so every aspect needed to be integrated into my day to day life. This is reflected in the action plan.

### **Apply self regulation and feedback**

I decided to use a diary to record my feelings and thoughts about my health, fitness, anything I notice about my beliefs around aging, as well as any health issues that I needed to address, and through this feedback to tweak the design as necessary.

### **Each element performs multiple functions**

This principle applies to many of the design decisions; for example Omega oils are good for both brain function and joints; a regular trip into town for a greater variety of vegetables would mean a more active lifestyle; the spiritual/psychological elements perform many different functions.

### **Each function is supported by more than one element**

Again, this principle shows up throughout the design: eg the function of improving brain health is supported by Omega oils and learning new stuff; exercise has a variety of elements.

### **Value the edges**

I would make use of leading edge research about the aging process and staying youthful. And I would enlist the help of people on the edges of my life, eg guests coming from Europe who could bring stuff I can't get here, and who might have new ideas for me.

### **Creatively use and respond to change**

In my climate, the changing seasons (dry/rainy, hot/very hot) makes a difference to exercise possibilities. During all seasons I would need to be very flexible.

### **Catch and store energy**

- Getting more active >>> having more energy
- More mental activity >>> more mental energy

### **Design from patterns to details**

The pattern of the branches and main roots of my tree of life (the areas of life that I am focusing my attention on) moves to the details of its leaves and smaller roots.

## **INTEGRATION**

Visiting and revisiting the anchor points led to many ideas and a load of research about what's important for a healthy, happy old age, and achieving my vision; the research led to the details of diet, exercise, changing mental patterns, etc. I decided to integrate these into a drawing of a tree (representing longevity, resilience and strength), and to use a weekly and monthly review process to integrate them into my life. These two together (the drawing and the review process) form the final design.

My vision forms the heart of the tree. Its main branches represent practical aspects (eg exercise, diet) which subdivide (eg exercise into physical and mental). The details are on the



## **ACTION PLAN**

- Draw the design as a tree of life and put it prominently on my bedroom wall
- Every day use my existing planning sheets to record what I eat, the exercise I take, etc.
- Use my existing journal to note psychological and spiritual stuff connected to the design.
- Once a week carry out a review :
  - Create a dedicated notebook for this.
  - Notice both my successes and challenges, any changes in my state of mind, my beliefs etc, and monitor any health and fitness issues.
  - In particular, monitor new activities to ensure I keep going.
  - Make a note of new ideas, new learning from ongoing research etc.
  - Make additions/changes to the design as necessary
  - Give myself a focus for each week, perhaps to maintain what I am already doing, or maybe to add new things. Add any new additions gradually.
  - Write the week's focus on my daily planning sheets so that I refer to them every day.

## **MOMENTUM**

The weekly review would ensure that I notice areas in need of attention, and that if I am flagging I address that. I also decided to ask my sister to support my momentum with a monthly conversation about my progress through the design.

## **APPRECIATION**

I decided to acknowledge achievements through the weekly review. I also made a list of things I appreciate about myself and my situation specific to this design, including my basic good health and powerful immune system, my education and resources enabling me to do research, that I was already on a path of positive change; that I could afford to eat well; my openness to new ideas; that I had friends around to help and support me.

## **REFLECTION**

Reflection on my progress towards my vision would be through the weekly review and monthly skype with Annie.

## **PAUSE**

Rest and relaxation: essential for good health and a factor in longevity.

Miss exercise sometimes? Have a diet lapse? This anchor point reminded me not to beat myself up if I don't stick exactly to my plan all the time.

## APPENDIX 1

### About challenging negative beliefs and language

I believe that our reality is in large part created by what we believe and what we focus on. If I believe I am going to have a miserable old age, I will create it. If I believe I will have no money, and focus on the lack of money, most likely I will have no money. If I believe that getting old inevitably leads to degeneration of body and mind, that will likely be my fate.

It is possible to change even deep seated beliefs with various psychological and spiritual practices. Language reflects and reinforces belief: I can catch negative language and replace it with the language of youthfulness. Visualising myself in healthy, youthful old age, living my vision, will help me believe in it, and bring it about. I can change my outlook from a lack mentality to an abundance mentality.

## APPENDIX 2

### IDEAS AND INSPIRATIONS

- To design in the different areas of diet, exercise, money, rest and relaxation, and spiritual/emotional psychological stuff.
- In each area prioritise actions
- Books: Joe Dispenza's 'Changing the Habit of Being Yourself'; Barbara de Angelis 'Choice for Love'; Louise Hay 'You Can Heal Your Life'
- Research fasting in relation to health
- Research the habits and diet of long living, healthy communities
- Research diets and supplements for arthritis, brain health, inflammatory processes
- Find non dairy, non GMO alternatives to dairy milk
- Create recipe book
- Get the habit of smiling more.
- Laugh more. Watch comedies. Laugh at myself.
- Shop once a week at Kisutu market for access to a wider range of vegetables and for salads
- Keep a fitness diary
- Online brain teasers, su doku, crosswords.
- Daily visualization of myself as a very old, very healthy woman, in different situations. And at stages in between.
- Less sitting. Get a more active lifestyle.
- Make use of people coming from Europe etc for bringing supplements etc, and my sister Annie for posting stuff from UK.
- To present the design as a tree (Tree of Life)

## EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

*I wrote this evaluation and reflection a few months after finishing the design. Since then, although I have kept up with many of the design elements, there are also many that I am no longer doing, and quite a lot (of the psychological elements in particular) that never became regular habits. I have not done regular reviews for a long time; they became too much of a chore. My view now is that the design lacks a well-considered implementation plan, which might have encouraged me to keep going, and to tweak it as necessary. The 'momentum' anchor point would be the perfect place for that.*

July 2021

### **EVALUATION, February 2017**

Largely, the design works and I'm happy with it. Spending a dedicated time each week to review progress really keeps me on the ball, throws up new ideas, shows if I am trying to do too much, and throws light on areas that I might be missing/avoiding/struggling with. It keeps the psychological aspects in mind, some of which are easy to let slip if I don't have a regular way to focus on them. I'm happy with the presentation of the design as a tree, and having it on my bedroom wall works well as I look at it often and am reminded of everything I'm trying to do.

However, having started implementation early September 2017 my lifestyle took quite a turn mid October, with a 2 month visit from my son, including travelling together for one month, followed by a three week visit from a friend. I managed to keep going with a lot of the changes I'd made but the weekly review fell by the wayside early November and I have not had another monthly review with my sister since the first in early October. There were also several activities that fell, partly as a result of not doing the review (eg. weekly fasting, increased exercise, some of the psycho/spiritual things). I am just getting back to it now (mid February).

I'm not very happy to have had such a long gap; however I think it points to a tendency to allow all my routines to crumble when something happens to challenge them, and my inclination to practise self sabotage, rather than an intrinsic problem with the design. So it's been useful in helping me see that. Also, it shows me the importance of the weekly review. Things fall apart when I don't do it.

One way I could tweak the design to help prevent this from happening would be to have a photo of the design in the weekly review book, as one issue is that the design is stuck on a board so it can hang on the wall, and is much too large to take with me when I go away.

I have tweaked the vision very slightly after comments from a friend, to put it in the present tense rather than the future; to think and behave as if one's goal has already happened is standard practice in the world of affirmations, manifesting your dreams etc.



I have also tweaked the weekly review process so that I now use PNI. This is useful, helping me to make sure I see the positive as well as the negative.

One improvement I would make if I were to do a similar design again would be to leave plenty of space for additions on the design itself. There is room for a few, but if I wanted to add many leaves to the tree it would be difficult. A way around this would be to present the design as a 3D computer image, which I guess (although I have no experience) would be very adaptable to any future changes. The downside would be that I would need access to the computer any time I wanted to look at it, and it would need a conscious decision to do so, rather than being visible all the time.

**REFLECTION, February 2017**

I enjoyed using the Design Web. I went through it in a very informal way, moving back and forth around the anchor points, using paper and pen to record my thoughts and ideas, one or more sheets per anchor point. For me, this is a more attractive and effective way of working than to work on a computer, although it may be more time consuming. Some anchor points were more fruitful than others; 'limits' gave me important reminders about how progress might be impeded; considering 'ideas and inspirations' allowed me to come up with many different solutions; thinking about 'momentum and reflection' helped me come up with the idea of the weekly review, which is a crucial aspect of the design.

On reflection I realize I did not really make use of any design tools, other than web based Google research, and, in effect, although not formally, a client interview, noting all my observations and producing my vision. It may have been useful to have done a SWOT analysis on my lifestyle in relation to my vision. Mind mapping might have helped in organizing my ideas.

It is very clear to me that even in a project as personal as this, applying a design process to my ideas is extremely useful. I am quite sure that without it I would not be doing everything that I am doing, I would be struggling with remembering what I want to do, and I would be feeling much less confident than I am now that I can achieve my vision. The process of doing the design has removed much of the fear that motivated me to do it.

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