

Still Growing Up

By Dennis Knight

Growing up is a task that is handed to us at birth. Most of reach our maximum height by the time we are about twenty, and by default we fall into that category of humans called The Grownups. At that point we are expected to demonstrate mature behavior, participate in society, and, if we produce children, raise them to become successful grownups themselves. Sometimes we do these things well, sometimes not so well.

Ask me if I'm a grownup and I'll tell you no, I'm happily still in the process, and please don't expect me to get there too soon. As long as I am learning, I am still in the business of growing up.

There are plenty of models for me to follow in this quest. Laura Ingalls Wilder had a lifetime of teaching, which necessarily also involves a lifetime of learning. She didn't publish the first of her "Little House" books until she was in her late sixties, and she was inspired to that by learning from her own daughter's budding writing career.

Frank McCourt was born in Brooklyn in 1930 in the throes of the Great Depression, but he was raised in Ireland after the family returned to the old country, only to sink more deeply into poverty and the dysfunction of an alcoholic father. His schooling ended at age thirteen and he helped his mother and siblings survive by hook and by crook. He connived his way back to America six years later and at twenty-one he was drafted into the Korean War. He eventually used his G.I. Bill, and, without the prerequisite of a high school diploma, talked his way into the prestigious New York University. By the age of twenty-seven he was a teacher. At age sixty-six he wrote and published his memoir, *Angela's Ashes* for which he received a Pulitzer Prize.

Anna Mary Robertson Moses was born in 1860, married in 1887 and lived on a farm in Virginia. She had ten children, five of whom died at childbirth. At the age of seventy-six and crippled with arthritis, she gave up embroidery and began to paint. Grandma Moses may have lacked technical expertise, but her works are folksy and colorful masterpieces created from the fabric of a lifetime of learning.

My personal role model is Meyer "Mike" Harris who joined our Windsor Gardens Writers' Group a little over a year ago at the age of ninety-five. He claims to never have written at all, yet he is a powerful wordsmith who has just begun to write down in beautiful pieces the journal of a long life. I know we will have learned something new and grown just a little more when Mike reads his article this morning, and I believe he will have gotten the same from the rest of us. There is no better example than that of a man who is still Growing Up as he approaches the milestone of a hundred years in the process.