Smith ‘66 Aging Well Over 50 Years: A Kaleidoscope of Choices
AS A PROFESSIONAL DESIGNER, I THINK
A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS!

1966-1978
MARRIAGE
1978-1986
DIVORCE
1986
TRAVEL
TO NYC
1966
TRAVEL
TO NYC
1986
UWS
Wells

SWISH EDEN
RIP
CHANGE
SINGLE
SCENE

VARIOUS
CORPORATE
JOBS

YOGA!

FINANCIAL
SECURITY

SUMMER
IN ITALY

GARDEN DESIGN
BUSINESS

INDIA LIT.
ITALY

PERSONAL
FREEDOM

PROOF
SESSION

1980-2000
NYC
UWS
36 YRS!
2000-2015
1980 2000
Growing Older With Grit ...
Courage
and Grace
We report being happier with life now than we were in 1966.
Why? Resilient, Adaptive Coping Styles

1) Humor

2) Seeing the bright side (making lemonade out of lemons) or stiff upper lip or stoicism

3) Creativity – putting something of value in the world that was not there before

4) Anticipation (deliberate planning for future challenges and loss)

5) Altruism

Aging Well, Vaillant
Why? Humor

- We report being quite good-humored in '66 and are even more so now.

  “The witch in the bathroom is always something of a jolt.”

  “I am surprised about how much fun sex is.”

  “Should not have married my first husband – he is still a jerk.”

  “Now, almost 71, I have a new knee and a new haircut and I'm ready for quite a few more years!”

  “I like to drive fast on the highway and pretend I don’t have white hair.”
Seeing the Bright Side
Why? Seeing the Bright Side

- We report that we tended to see the bright side in ‘66, and do so even more now.

“Being fired from a job and being divorced both caused me great self-questioning and necessitated unanticipated changes. Ultimately, both allowed me to grow and become a stronger, more interesting person (to myself anyway).”

“Having a 2nd baby at 48 definitely changed my life. It led to many new adventures, new friends of different generations and new work endeavors.”

“I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and am grateful to be alive 3 plus years later. I am blessed with current good health and a supportive, concerned family and many friends. Since that date, every day is a Gift.”
Why? Creativity

- In ‘66, we rated ourselves quite creative, productive, and intellectually curious and are even more so now.

“Earning a Ph.D. and 2 additional years as a post-doctoral fellow. This opened up wonderful opportunities in academia, including brain research which I still do.”

“I got an MBA at a top tier Ivy business school. This degree allowed me to jump to the corporate executive track.”

“I was fortunate enough to work at a school where I had a great group of colleagues and felt that I was able to contribute as a leader.”

“I was a serial entrepreneur from the ages of 30 through 50. Nothing’s more fun that starting something new.”
Creativity, continued

“Having made Senior Vice-President of an International Bank, when downsized at 42, I basically said, 'screw it’ - and retired. I was incredibly lucky to be able to do so financially…the true luxury is TIME. I moved to my weekend house (farm in the country ) became a volunteer firefighter, trustee of the local historical society, founding trustee of an historic house/art museum (Thomas Cole's), took up 18th Century re-enacting and am a fairly well known 18th Century cook and hearth cooking teacher, developed a whole new career in the sport of polo - first managing a club, and then managing a training program for kids. “
Why? Anticipation – deliberate planning for future challenges, loss, and end-of-life

- 85% of us are planning for the future much more so now than in ‘66.

  “Children are both doctors, ready and available to help with medical issues and a family home large enough for live in help if needed. Hospice will be my choice as end of life nears.”

  “As a member of an Elders Salon, I find I’m more focused on death and dying than I probably would be otherwise, and I consider that a true gift. Our culture seems to have an unnatural relationship with the idea of dying, ironic since no one will escape it.

  “Being in touch with family, friends, writing-telephoning to keep me involved in the realities of their lives, to help me focus on who I still am in spite of illness. Being OPEN about my feelings and directives with family, friends, and doctors.”
Why? Anticipation – deliberate planning for future challenges, loss, and end-of-life

“I don't have many feelings about my death, because I prefer not to think about it. Isn't denial wonderful?

“Were I to find myself alone at the end, I would make sure I had the aid of the Hemlock Society in order to plan my exit.”

“My daughter and I talk easily about both the business end of death and what kind of help I might need from her. My group of 5 old high school classmates meet monthly for breakfast and discuss all kinds of issues, keeping a sense of humor.”

“ I have a deep faith and assurance of my life after death and regularly spend time with a group of women who share this faith, as well as encouragement in how to live the rest of this life.”
Why? **Altruism: More so now than in ’66**

- About 57% of us say it helps to relieve our distress and sadness when we find opportunities to help others.

- “Parenthood has had the greatest impact on my life, followed by marriage. I am a better person for having learned to put the welfare of others first.”

- “We spent 2 years in the Peace Corps in Tunisia from 1967-69. Having had this experience colored all the rest of our lives in how we feel responsibility for others in the US and world.”

- “The death of my mother... first caused me to lose my strong faith and then opened me up to a much larger more in depth connection to God and Creation. This ultimately was responsible for my career in Chaplaincy.”

- “In the early 90s, an anti-Semitic speaker came to our college, and although he had a First Amendment right to speak, his hateful ideas had to be challenged. I became more of an activist both on my campus and in the Modern Language Association, for I saw the need for someone to stand up.”
Activism, Mentoring, Volunteerism, Health Care in Nairobi
Helping Us: Our 50th Reunion Leaders et al.!
Helping Us: Our Smith ‘66 Reunion Book
93% of us rate ourselves in good to excellent physical health with a pretty good to excellent memory (81%)

Health and mental health problems: arthritis (47%), cancer (33%), cataracts (31%), back or spine problems (28%), osteoporosis (22%), hearing loss (21%), depression or anxiety (20%)

“I feel as if my body may appear to be 70, but my mind and spirit, and joie de vivre are that of a much younger person.”

“The most surprising thing is that I’m in the prime of my mind. How did my contemporaries get to look and act old while I still feel so capable & effective.”

“I don’t feel as old as I am. I am often startled when I see a photo or a reflection in a window – and think ‘who is that old lady?’
Why? Physical and Emotional Well-being

- 3% of us have alcoholism; one woman wrote that she has been in recovery from alcohol for 26 years
- 99% of us do not smoke today (vs. 85% of us 25 years ago)
- 50% report weighing about the same or less than we did in college
- 86% engage in moderate exercise (e.g., walking); 33% in vigorous exercise (e.g., running)

Aging Well, Vaillant, 2002
Dealing with Loss

- 11% of us have lost a spouse or partner to death
  
  “The death of my first husband changed my life forever. I had 2 children and was suddenly on my own. I learned I had an inner strength and ability to survive which until then I was unaware of.”

- 30% function as the primary caregiver for an ill spouse or partner

- Some of us have lost a child or grandchild to death

- Despite these painful losses, 95% of us report that we have coped somewhat well or as well as can be expected.
  
  “The sudden death of my spouse almost 4 years ago has dramatically altered my life in ways I could not imagine. What is particularly difficult is that people think you should be over it after a year or so (except dear friends or members of the ‘club’). Each year is different and it is impossible to predict when those raw emotions will come to the fore.”
Why? Stable Love Relationships: Marriage, Partnership, Friendships

- Currently, 70% of us are married, remarried, or in a committed relationship with a man and 2 of us are married or committed to a woman.

- 50% of us have made new friends to keep feelin’ alive.

- 10% of us have found a new spouse, partner, or lover.

“Meeting a new guy (or gal) can make you feel like a teenager!”
“There’s still something about a Yale-Smithie wedding that gives me major goose bumps.”
Why? Stable Love Relationships: Marriage, Partnership, Friendships

- On average, in our marriages and committed relationships, we are fairly happy and more than moderately satisfied with our sex lives; we also say:
  - we have our needs met, laugh a lot, and enjoy doing things together

- A majority of us (85%) have at least one close, stable relationship that helps us during times of stress and/or sadness
  - A spouse or partner (78%)
  - Close friend (78%) – on average, we have 7-8 close friends
  - Doctor, therapist or counselor (32%)
  - Beloved pet (20%)
**Kids, Grandkids, and Family**

- We have 2 biological children on average; a few have adopted children or stepchildren.

- A majority of us has 2-3 grandkids; a few have step-grandkids.

- We feel highly connected and have fun with them, learn new things from them, feel proud of them, and help them.

- “The birth of my children was the real watershed event in my life.”

- “I loved raising our sons. Well, I didn’t enjoy the teenage years, but the rest were great.”

- “Now, I LOVE being a grandmother, although wish our children were not spread across the country, so I can’t spend enough time with them all!”
Life Paths

- 18% of us have been full-time homemakers over our lives. “Parenthood has had the greatest impact on my life.”

- Most of us spend time on community service (10-40 hours a month)

- 75% of us have had full-time employment for 31 years, on average
  - Ranging from investment management, journalism, TV news, and politics to hospital chaplaincy
  - Strong sense of accomplishment, learning, satisfaction, and enjoyment mentoring others

  “Professionally, a watershed event — designing a study of the psychological aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident.”

  The best time was when I was a psychotherapist and helping my clients improve their self-esteem.”

  “The most satisfying period of time included my 20+ years in senior management at a number of high tech companies. I was able to help mentor and develop many outstanding individuals who moved on to very successful careers of their own.”
Sex discrimination in the workplace and sports

- “People need to know that being a girl is challenging. Have you ever been in a situation where you don’t have equal rights, where there are more jobs and sports available to people just because of gender? Well, this is what it is like being a girl.”  a 10-year old ‘66 Smith granddaughter

- “When I went to apply for a temp position, prior to graduate school, I was asked about academic honors. I listed Phi Beta Kappa. I was told, ‘We don’t consider sororities to be academic honors.’”

- “When I indicated I had studied in Europe on a Fulbright scholarship, I was informed that Fulbright was a communist.”

- “Today, there are laws prohibiting the kinds of comments made to me, like ‘What kind of contraception are you using’ or ‘We’d never make a woman head of anything.’”
Sex discrimination in employment & community service

- 66% of us have experienced sex discrimination re career/community service
  - Promotions, sexual harassment, career choices, compensation, balancing work and family

- “Doors that were closed in our day are open now, but once through them the same old bigots are still there, some of them women themselves, and they will find ways apart from exclusion to deny progress to women who are softer than barracudas.”

- “Sex discrimination still exists, the pressures of career versus family still exist, and the job pressures have increased tremendously. In addition, the competition in the workplace is brutal now and wages are lower for women than men.”

- “Though I definitely think there are more opportunities for young women in the working world, I am sad for those who would like to be stay-at-home moms, even for just a few years, but who cannot afford it in today’s economy.”

- “There are relatively more opportunities for women, more intolerance of sex discrimination yet women with professional careers are still expected to do it all - job, children, home.”

- “Things have improved in the workplace for educated, white women.”
Sex discrimination in employment and politics

- “Overt bias is largely gone, but implicit bias still exists. It’s still not possible (and maybe not even desirable) to have it all.”

- “Some men seem lost without the assurance of their superiority to women.”

- “Still not enough women in the Senate, House (and hopefully Presidency), we still need more Governors, CEOs of both profit and nonprofit firms, and more women in the Board room!”

- “Many of the battles for equal rights for women have been won that benefit women who do not even call themselves feminists.”

- Thank you, Gloria Steinem, ET AL.!

  “And I suspect that, like many women here, I am living out the unlived life of my mother. And this is a huge step forward. It’s also true that we need to move forward to a time when parents live out their own dreams”
Molly Ivins
Can’t Say That, Can She?

“If there is a shrewder, funnier observer of the American scene writing today than Molly Ivins, I do not know her. This is unconventional wisdom with no inhibitions. Bless her and don’t let her change.”

—David Broder, Washington Post
“Retirement”

- 14% of us are still working full-time; 25% transitioning to retire
  

- Nearly 50% of us (vs. 59% of our husbands or partners) who were employed have already retired, esp. in the past 5 years

- Major reasons for retiring: 90% are happy about it
  
  - A few of us retired for health reasons, hearing loss, death of a child, being laid off, relocation, position was eliminated
  - Wanting to have time for other interests and for friends and family
  - Wanting to travel and do new things

“After retirement, I was able to spend weeks/months at Spring Training watching the Mets.”
“Now, mostly retired, I can do what I want when I want.”
Religious and Spiritual Beliefs

Almost 60% of us engage in a religious or spiritual practice or have faith in something when there are no clear solutions for our problems
- Protestant (40%) Jewish (14%) Catholic (5%) Other (1%)
- 30% are spiritual, but not practice any form of religion
- 10% are agnostic or committed atheists
  - “I regret any time I spent supporting organized (and disorganized) religion.”

About 33% of us engage in prayer and about 20% practice yoga or meditation

We also participate in a host of meaningful activities:
- “Nature is my church, my solace, my inspiration.”
- “I attend organ recitals at the National Cathedral.”
- “I participate in church-sponsored activities, e.g., prisoner education/support.”
- “Alcoholics Anonymous”
Politics and Causes

- Democratic affiliation (78% now versus 56% in 1966)
- Republican affiliation (11% now versus 18% in 1966)
- Independent (10% now versus 16% in 1966 and 10% not committed)
- Definitely not Trump! 50% for Clinton 18% for Sanders 15% don't know
  - No Donald on list? Preferences dispersed across Republican candidates
- Over last 50 years, most significant changes: 1) sexual equality at home and in workplace 2) civil rights movement 3) human-caused climate change 4) rise of Isis
- Biggest concerns today: 1) Income inequality, erosion of middle class 2) global warming 3) Middle East and rise of ISIS 4) gun control 5) dysfunctional congress
  
  A number of us said, “Black Lives Matter”
Favorite Books and Movies

Top 3 Books:

1) “Well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive. Those reasons matter not just at the end of life, or when disability comes, but all along the way.”
   Being Mortal

2) “When I lost my sight, people said I was brave. When my father left, people said I was brave. But it is not bravery; I have no choice. I wake up and live my life. Don’t you do the same?”
   All the Light We Cannot See

3) “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”
   To Kill A Mockingbird

Others: Color Purple, Harry Potter, Atonement, Boys in the Boat, Sex Over 50

Top 5 Movies:

1) Forrest Gump  2) Sophie’s Choice  3) Schindler’s List
   4) The Graduate  5) The Lives of Others
25th Reunion Survey

50th Reunion Survey

Cartoons by Mike Witte, Princeton ‘66
Smith ‘66 and Princeton ’66 today: Mostly similar with a few differences

- We report being less competitive and more altruistic today than does P
- 70% of us vs. 90% of P are married or in a committed relationship
- 25% of us live alone vs. 11% of P
- 10% of us vs. 25% of P has found a new spouse, partner, or lover

- Whom do we rely upon during times of stress and sadness?
  - Smith: 78% spouse or partner 78% close friend
  - Princeton: 93% spouse partner 38% close friend

- Most significant event since 1966: S - Equal rights for women  P - Vietnam
Smith ‘66 and Princeton ’66 today: Mostly similar with a few differences

- 48% of us vs. 35% of P are fully retired
  - Concerns about retiring: 45% of us worry about money vs. 27% of P

- Democratic Political affiliation: 78% of us vs. 52% of P

- Republican Political affiliation: 11% of us vs. 28% of P

- Independent Political Affiliation: 10% of us vs. 20% of P
  - 54% of us vs. 40% of P plan to vote for Clinton
  - 15% of us vs. 8% of P plan to vote for Sanders
  - 15% of us vs. 16% of P don’t know

- 38% of S vs. 23% of P read more than 30 books a year or more
Views on Smith
Views on Smith

Would you go to Smith again?

- 53% Yes
- 35% Maybe
- 10% No - Why?
  - 81% P
  - 13% P
  - 6% P

"Did not like single-sex environment"
"Too much work for me and not enough academic support."
"I felt out of place among the girls from wealthy families & private schools."
"I consider the treatment of Christine LeGarde to be a significant negative."
One person said, “I am concerned about the admission of transgendered individuals.”

What should be done to improve Smith attract better students?

More emphasis on liberal arts roots, more free speech on campus, add more science & engineering courses, highlight the heterosexual community, recognize graduates more
What we currently like about Smith

- Small, single-sex, liberal arts college, strength in science and engineering, highly intelligent student body and faculty, academic excellence, international students, FRIENDSHIPS!
“Beautiful young women are accidents of nature, but beautiful older women are works of art.”

--adapted from a quotation by Eleanor Roosevelt

Look how we’ve grown!
When you have the harvest of a life of learning and thinking and observing, and at the same time, you’re still active. I have to tell you, it’s wisdom on the hoof.

-- by Mary Catherine Bateson, author of Composing a Life
You are all beautiful, unique, and long-lasting works of art in the ways you have contributed to being in the world!

Thank you all so much for your genuine, wise, and wonderful comments!

To see the full ppt presentation, go to smith66.org
To sum up

Aging well means to love, to work, to learn something new, and to enjoy the remaining precious moments with loved ones, especially at our 50th Smith reunion!