

## BOOK REVIEW – Marianne Vespry

### **The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life** **Gene Cohen 2000** **New York: HarperCollins**

We are all creative, naturally creative, all our lives. Creativity is not limited to the ‘big C Creativity’ of the arts, writing, invention, or celebrity pursuits. Creativity also has a ‘small c’ component that manifests in each of us. We use our social creativity to solve problems in relationships, to write a letter or a special message on a card, to help organize a gathering of family or friends, a fund-raiser or a pot-luck lunch, or a special event to honour a family member or community leader. We use it to support family and friends through illness and adversity. We use it keep spirits up, to establish and keep connections. Cooking, sewing, gardening, maintenance tasks, hobbies may be social or solitary, but they all call forth our ‘small c’ creativity.

What is special, then, about creativity in the ‘second half of life’?

‘Life stage’ lists have traditionally recognized infancy, early childhood, school age, adolescence, and young adulthood, five stages in our first 25 years. For the next 50 to 75 years they have suggested two stages, adulthood and old age – responsibility and decline.

Cohen, however, offers later-life ‘human potential stages’ which are altogether more interesting and engaging.

In the *Mid-life Reevaluation Phase* (typically 40s to early 60s) creative expression is shaped by a sense of crisis or quest. It “combines the capacity for insightful reflection with a powerful desire to create meaning in life.”

In the *Liberation phase* (60s to early 70s) a new degree of personal freedom comes both from within and externally from retirement. We say, “If not now, when?” We have time to try new things, and we give ourselves permission to experiment.

The *Summing Up Phase* (70s, 80s) “sees creative expression shaped by the desire to find larger meaning in the story of our lives, and to give in a larger way of the wisdom we have accrued.”

In the *Encore Phase* (80s and older) “creative expression is shaped by the desire to make strong, lasting contributions . . . , to affirm life, take care of unfinished business, and celebrate one’s own contribution.”

*The Creative Age* is filled with examples of big-C and small-c creativity. Margin notes on 250 pages feature thumbnail biographies of creative individuals, and quotes about creative living. In the central narrative, each idea is illustrated by brief case studies.

Creativity may continue from earlier into later years, may manifest with aging, may be called forth by loss. It may find ways to heal old hurts, to establish new links with contemporaries and across generations. Identity is the ultimate product of creativity, what we make of ourselves in response to our life experience.