

Reviewed by Ellen B. Ryan  
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Writing, Aging and Spirit: [www.writingdownouryears.ca](http://www.writingdownouryears.ca)

## **Conscious Living, Conscious Aging: Embrace and Savor Your Next Chapter**

Ron Pevny; New York: Atria Books/Beyond Words, 2014.

*Conscious eldering is about choosing  
to intentionally embark on the final chapter of our hero's journey,  
entering uncharted territory to discover our potential  
to bring the gifts of true elders to a world urgently in need.*

Without physically guiding us on retreat deep into nature, Ron Pevny takes us on the next best journey – a stay-at-home version of the essence of his [Choose Conscious Eldering](#) retreats. Administrator of the fifteen-organization [Conscious Aging Alliance](#), Pevny is a psychotherapist.

Pevny invites us to commit to conscious aging and indeed to pursue what conscious eldering might mean specifically for each of us. He has studied with Jan Milburn who has engaged over a long period of time with the Raramuri people in Northern Mexico. He teaches us what he has learned about the archetypal ELDER. This indigenous group employs a traditional 12-year training period for this honoured role – preparing elders to lead the people to live in balance with nature and other influences.

**Conscious Eldering** takes into account the messages of the Positive Aging movement -- healthy aging, aging in community, life planning, seniors in service -- but adds the spiritual dimension. An older person commits to the ongoing inner work required to enter the new life stage of Elderhood, with an enhanced sense of identity and a calling to serve. Both identity and calling must change and grow across later life and through the dying process. Pevny places special emphasis on the role of nature as healer and teacher. He also illustrates how rituals can embody the dramatic transitions required for conscious aging.

To achieve such a transformative spirituality, one commits to sustaining spiritual practices and finding (or creating) a supportive community. Pevny addresses a series of practices, including life review, re-writing our disempowering life stories, forgiveness, releasing the past, living in-between, legacy building, creativity, rites of passage, community, and service. The exercises in the appendix are especially suitable for writers – journaling on life review, legacy letters, no regrets, death lodge rite of transition, wisdom of dreams, and setting 'ten intentions for ten years'.

*Any form of creative expression we resonate with is especially valuable during such times when inner sterility and lack of purpose and passion may be frequent visitors. Creating works of art, engaging in creative storytelling, writing poetry, trying to bring creativity to our music making, finding playful ways to express*

*ourselves – all these activities and many more can be instrumental in helping to get our intuition and inspiration flowing and free up stagnant energy.*

Pevny concretely illustrates how conscious aging is lived out by including personal essays by retreatants, here excerpted.

*The questions foremost in my mind are, Have I lived my life as I should have? When I am close to death, will I have regrets, looking back on the life I lived? What can I do with the rest of my life?*

*A woman [referring to self] came to a desert paradise longing for solitude, for a time of being in beauty. She found, to her surprise, that she can have solitude while being alone but also while in community filled with respect, generosity, and ritual.*

*I gave up being plagued by the question “what are you going to do now?” and replaced it with Rabbi Schacter-Shalomi’s words, “Oh my soul, you are growing something special and good inside me. How can I give it the proper sunshine and nourishment to ensure that it grows to health and vigor?” Life was in charge now, and I could only wonder what life was asking of me as I entered more fully into my elder years, alone.*

*I am exploring the possibilities for me to best contribute my gifts and asking myself whether I have the courage to stand on the front lines for the changes I believe need to happen. But as I make these choices, I am committed to creating an elderhood where my actions arise from the spaciousness I know I need to thrive.*

Overall, Pevny invites us to serve and savour as we age. In this regard, I was struck by two specific comments about the value of committing to conscious aging. When we learn wholeness and balance, we can accomplish less with more impact during years of frailty. Moreover, energy for action comes from alignment with the needs of our soul.

*There is no greater legacy  
that we can leave for the generations that will follow us  
and no greater gift that we can give ourselves  
than to aim high as we age, ever reaching for our best.  
The world needs the wholeness, wisdom, and gifts of conscious elders.*