

**Project with an Older Adult**

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H was born February 18, 1915 in Egg Harbor City, New Jersey when it was a rural area. She grew up in a well respected family. Her siblings, parents and three aunts were all very close and lived in the same house. Her life was fairly consistent through good times and bad. She was employed at the same job for 50 years and her one boyfriend became her life-long husband. Raising her family was her priority. In addition, she had a life-long commitment to volunteering for the good of her community. She has been alive long enough to see her husband and daughter pass away.

Her first memory was playing in the goat house. She remembered that they slaughtered the goat and she didn't want to eat it because it had been a family pet. Most of her memories were about playing out in the yard with the animals.

H's family was poor, but they never knew they were poor. They had lots of love and attention. There were three aunts, who were like mothers to her. There was also an uncle who lived with them. They enjoyed the simple things in life; playing with insects and leaves. Crickets were pets. Two big leaves, filled with other leaves, became sandwiches for her dolls. Life in summer was outdoors at the creek that ran through their woods or at the public bath a block away.

H describes her mother as an angel. She got along with her father's three sisters and one brother. She let them do whatever they wanted to do with the children. She was easy going and social. Her father was the one who "went out into the business world and the community". He was a carpenter, a contractor and the treasurer of the bank in Egg Harbor City. When he died, he

was getting ready to run for political office. The family also had a pigeon and chicken business. H could not identify any weaknesses in her parents.

H had an older sister and an older brother. They were all three years apart. Her sister was strong willed and her brother more or less followed along with her. She was a "spoiled brat" to her sister, always getting into her things. They did not become close until they were older. As a child she played more with her brother because he was closer in age. There were not many other children to play with.

Her parents got along very well. She never knew of any disagreement. Her mother would acquiesce to the other adults and her father was often out, involved with business. The members of her family got along well with each other. There would be lots of discussions. People might have thought they were arguing, but they did not consider it conflict. The atmosphere at home was peaceful.

H doesn't recall being punished as a child. She remembers being spoiled because they had "four mothers". Her father left everything up to the other members of the family and hardly ever expressed any wishes about what should be done.

The youngest aunt was the person closest to H. H slept with her from the time she was a small child until she got married. The three aunts never had children and "sort of adopted them". The oldest aunt was her brother's caretaker. The middle one was the philosophical one and had a big influence on H's sister, a well known peace activist.

H thinks she is most like her mother because she was slow moving, like her. She said that neither one was into "fast action."

Her first memory of death was her uncle's death when she was in high school. The next death she experienced was her father's when she was 21. Her father had been the breadwinner and when he died their lives changed. Her mother had no income and the family lost their home. They were forced to move into the city. The close knit family slowly began to split up, moving to different locations.

When she was seven H had scarlet fever and was quarantined along with her aunt. They lived in another house her aunts owned across the street.

In her early adolescence H had problems because she was not in the "in crowd" because of her strict moral upbringing and because she was from "out in the sticks". Boys would tease her and she acquired an inferiority complex. She overcame this in her later adolescence when she joined school clubs and became an honor student. She won the respect of her peers academically, rather than socially. H, along with her siblings, received the message that they had to live up to the adults' expectations. It was important to be respected.

When she was 16 she started going steady with her future husband. They kept steady company for seven years before getting married. They went on day trips together, driving up and back in one day. "In those days you didn't shack up. You had to be a virgin when you got married." He was her best friend.

She had one other friend. They both babysat and would take the babies for walks. She loved being with children and considered this her recreation.

H was not into sports. Instead she would sing and dance in local shows that were fundraisers for organizations. She studied and had good grades. However, she described herself as lazy when it came to homework and piano lessons. H won prizes for essays and spelling. She

knew her life work would be secretarial. She always did the spelling and proofreading for the family. She was "into words" and enjoyed analyzing them. She still keeps her dictionary with her, looking up words she does not know.

She did not work during high school. Her family used to work picking apples and berries. Once, they brought her along. The insects annoyed her and so she was more of a problem than a help. She did pluck pigeon feathers occasionally; getting two cents a piece. Her family paid her 5 cents for practicing the piano. H realized she was being paid for jobs she should have been doing for free. The children never had to work around the house because there were four women who did it all because they thought the children got in the way.

When asked, H does not recall real hardships. They were poor but did not need a lot. They enjoyed their simple life and she never desired things that wealthy people had. Hunger was never a problem because they raised their own food.

She remembers being loved even though the children were never hugged or kissed. H feels that all their needs were met. She focuses on the positive part of her life. The only unpleasantness she mentioned was when she was teased by her peers in her early teens. There were good times and bad, but nothing earth shattering. Her relationship with her husband was the most pleasant part. H's mother taught the children to accept whatever came along and to deal with it. H doesn't look back at her teenage years in terms of being happy or not happy.

When she was 21, H's father died. Two years later she was married. She had her first child, a daughter, at home with the family doctor when she was 25. When H was 34 she had her second child, a son, in the hospital. Her life revolved around her family. In her 50's she focused on her grandchildren. Her daughter had three boys, who spent a lot of time with her. Her son also

had three boys. She did not spend as much time with the younger grandchildren because they were spaced far apart. The grandchildren would go along on vacations with her and her husband. She does not see her four great grandchildren as much because they are too far apart in age and live farther away.

Starting in her early 40's H became active in the community, while her husband was busy working and pursuing his interest in history. For 40 years she biked year-round through Galloway Township collecting donations for the March of Dimes. She was PTA treasurer for 14 years.

Her first job was as a secretary at an insurance company with her father. After one year they both lost their jobs. It was the Depression and people were burning down their houses for the insurance money. Next, she worked at a building and loan company before being unemployed for a year. In January 1934 she began working at Renault Winery and stayed for 50 years. She retired when she no longer enjoyed her career due to a conflict with her changing duties. With hindsight, H realizes how stressful it was when the business changed and she was no longer needed. She thinks that may be why she went to a cardiologist and discovered she had a heart problem. For 13 years she continued on, not using her medication. When she had an angina attack, she learned she had a severe blockage of her arteries. Since then she has taken her medication and paid attention to diet and exercise. Today she takes Zocor for cholesterol, Isosorbide for her heart and Metoprolol for blood pressure. She also takes baby aspirin, niacin and cod liver oil daily.

H describes her husband as "one of a kind, the best guy in the world". "Who else could have lived with me for 60 some years?" He was easy going and always had something good to say about people. He was her first and only love. She never felt she missed anything by "not playing the field." She felt bad because she was a slow moving person and was often late, while he was an early riser. She recalls one day when she went to visit him in the nursing home (due to Alzheimer's disease) and overheard him being interviewed. He said that 1938 was the best year of his life because he married his wonderful wife. She identifies this moment as one of the most important events in her life.

H's mother-in-law lived with them when they were married. It did not present any problems. She remembers that they all got along well. She commented that she does not understand why other people have problems getting along.

H says her faults are being a worry wart and doing things too late. She thinks she is slow in responding due to her one-track mind. It has been this way her whole life. She was the last one to finish a test, but would get good grades. She doesn't watch team sports because she cannot follow them. Instead she enjoys sports involving individual performances because she finds them easier to follow.

H has no complaints about her life and says that she is the person she was born to be. She has good friends and great family. She lives day after day, through her good times and her bad times. When pressed to share her bad memories, she mentioned the loss of family members. Her up times were when she was with her family and traveling. She enjoys bird watching, traveling, gardening, music (including playing the piano), bike riding and taking care of cats. Today H enjoys her freedom. She says she is free to do whatever she wants, whenever she wants. H is still

driving but wishes she had better eyesight. She would like to do more than she is currently able to do. She likes to get out and mow the lawn, but now she has to stop and think if she should be doing it on a hot, humid day. She never did much housework, so there is no change with that. H wishes she could hike farther and bike faster. Her family continues to be the most important part of her life. She enjoys her TV because she can use it to listen to a variety of music. H says this helps to keep her sane in the winter when she cannot go out. Her life is a solitary one now. She does not mind being alone because she keeps herself occupied; keeping her mind and body active. A typical day starts at 9:30 with her yoga-like "bed exercises", followed by a walk to the post office, picking up trash along the way. She rides her bike 10 miles and practices piano for 20 minutes before having brunch. Later she reads her mail and the newspaper, gardens, does chores and sometimes takes a nap. About once a week she goes to a meeting or event. She eats dinner late and then listens to music, maybe watches TV and does crossword puzzles. H usually goes to bed around 2:00 a.m. She has no plans to change her living situation. H says she is a slow learner when it comes to anything mechanical because it does not interest her. On the other hand, she loves birds and has no trouble remembering their names. H also loves classical music and is interested in the composers and their lives.

She believes her health insurance (Medigap with BC and BS) is adequate. When her husband died she had to go on her own insurance and now pays \$688 every three months. Her insurance covers her doctor bills, but does not cover her eyes or teeth. Recently she paid \$800 a piece for two caps. When her husband went into a nursing home she was asked about a living will. Her son has all her important papers now since she signed everything over to her children. She took this step so that she would not lose everything because of the high cost of the nursing



home for her husband. H no longer worries about her finances. Her son and son-in-law handle everything, along with maintenance of the house. She lives on social security. Her biggest expense is her car insurance and her teeth. H hopes for a quick demise. She does not want to be a vegetable. H only wants the support that would bring her back to a normal life. She cannot imagine being in a nursing home or a wheelchair. Her fear is that this could happen; that she would be doomed to a "nonexistence." She wants to be "ALIVE" while she's living. During the seven years that I have known H, I have not noticed any aging. She seems the same as the day I first met her. She is in excellent physical shape, but she wishes she had more mobility. She had trouble with blockage of the arteries and now takes medication. Her skin has become thinner but has a minimum of wrinkles and no age spots. She had surgery on both eyes for cataracts, which did help. She had a fall a year ago and hurt her eye. There is a hemorrhage behind it. She now wears trifocals, which have been hard to adjust to. She thinks the trifocals cause her to feel dizzy sometimes. Her hearing loss, if any, is minimal. She likes people to talk slowly, but she says she has preferred that her whole life. She eats two meals a day: brunch around 11:30 a.m. and dinner around 8:00 p.m. H has had "minor repair work" on her leg and knee and says that it shows up once in a while and slows her down sometimes. She is a firm believer of "use it or lose it."

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. H is a good example of the Activity Theory. Every day is full of exercise, social involvement and community service.

2. Agreeable and conscientious are the two traits that I believe best describe H. Following in her mother's footsteps, she is agreeable, humble and easy to get along with. She is compliant, I believe, partly due to the importance of being respected by others. Her conscientiousness is evident in her daily schedule, the maintenance of her property and garden and her commitment to community service.

3. H is successfully aging. It is easy for her to do with less because of her life long simple lifestyle. Even before H stopped working she became involved with fundraising for the March of Dimes, traveling house to house in Galloway Township on bicycle. When she has had minor problems that have stopped her from biking, she continues to walk. She is a firm believer of use it or lose it.

4. Even though she is 92, I think H is in Erikson's seventh stage: Generativity vs. Stagnation. She continues to contribute to the society by carrying on some of her sister's peace work, volunteering and being involved in organizations. She is active with biking and gardening. Having watched H deal with the death of her spouse and her daughter, I believe she will face death with dignity. I do not think she questions that her life has meaning.

5. H is able to do all the ADL's and IADL's listed in the text. Her whole life she has only done minimal light housework. First her aunts and mother, then her husband and now the hired help take care of that.

6. H had a strict moral upbringing and was given the message that she, along with her siblings, had to live up to the adults' expectations. It was important to be respected. Therefore, I think she has both an internal and an external locus of control.

7. I do not think H has had a shift in overall perspective. Her upbringing supported a transcendent perspective all along. Her sister, who walked across the United States on her own for 29 years spreading a message of peace also influenced her. H's interest in material things has always been minimal.

8. I do not detect any memory loss. I think one reason may be that she describes herself as having been single-focused her entire life.

9. H and her husband would travel with their grandchildren and host annual Easter egg hunts. Some of the time she had a fun-seeking approach to grandparenting. At the same time she acknowledged the lines between parenting and grandparenting. H was also a companionate grandparent. She was involved, but not overly so. She talks lovingly and acceptingly of all her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

10. H is fortunate to be able to continue aging in place and has remained in the same house for 61 years. She maintains a large outdoor area, including her vegetable garden. She only does light housekeeping; no less than what she has done her whole life. Everyone has left the house, yet she seems content to be living at home by herself.