

**USING PHOTOGRAPHS TO UNDERSTAND THE
EXPERIENCES OF OLDER PEOPLE MIGRATING TO AND
LIVING IN A NEW SOUTH WALES COASTAL TOWN**

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AFFIRMATION OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for in the other degree.

I certify to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparation of this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in the thesis.

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Signature and Date

12/11/03

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	vi
List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	viii
List of Photographs	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
The Academic and Federal/State Governments Position	5
Aim of Study	7
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	9
The Geographical Focus of this Study	9
The Life Course Literature	12
Physicos Borrowings from Physical Science and Mathematics	14
Catastrophe Theory	15
Dynamics	17
Dissipative Structures and Bifurcation	18
Fractal Geometry	20
Bios: Bios consist of the borrowings from biological sciences	22
Autopoiesis	23
Ecology	24
Socius: Studies derived from sociology and psychology	25
Theories of Ageing	25
Good Ageing	29
Life Markers	33
Control	35
Wisdom	37
Generativity	43
Gender	44
Marriage and Widowhood	50
Cognition and Ageing	51
Physical Activity, Health and Leisure	54
Loss	56
Spirituality and Religion	58
The Self, environment and Culture	60
Geography	62
Culture	64
Technology	67
Meaning	68
Conclusion	69

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	70
Introduction	70
Issues of Qualitative Research	71
Methodology	79
Recruitment	80
Occupation	81
Health	82
Marital Status	83
Procedure	83
Types of Analysis	86
Barthes' Approach	87
Chandler's Approach	88
Conclusion	94
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS OF QUANTATIVE STUDY OF CATEGORIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS	95
Introduction	95
Dwelling	99
Culture	100
Beach	101
Physical Status	101
Transport	102
Social	103
Generativity and Continuity	103
History	104
Services	105
Religion	106
Discussion	107
Conclusion	109
CHAPTER 5 PORTRAITS	110
Introduction	110
Conclusion	138
CHAPTER 6 MIGRATION: THE FANTASY AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCE	140
Introductio	140
The Migration Fantasy	142
Finding a House	145
The Settling in and Constructing of a Lifestyle	151
The Male Story	152
Comment on the Men's Views	162
The Female Story	164
Marital Relationships	174
Cultural Expression	177
Computer Stations	180
Transport	183
Continuity and Generativity	185
Health and Physical Recreation	188

Social Activity	191
Religion and the Beach	192
Life's Problems	194
Interaction with Historical Events	197
Comparison of Residents and Migrants	188
Conclusion	204
CHAPTER 7 REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION	206
Aspects of Personal History as an Influence on the Thesis	195
Linkage of Results with Literature Review	213
Good Ageing	214
Retirement as a Bifurcation Point in the Lifespan	216
Conflicting Statements	219
Apparent Arrogance	221
Pleasure	228
Summary of Findings	234
Recommendations	235
Final Reflections	243
REFERENCES	246
APPENDICES	259
Appendix 1: University of New England Human Research Ethics Committee Application and Approval	
Appendix 2: University of New England Research Ethics Consent Form	
Appendix 3: University of New England Research Ethics Photograph Use Consent Form	

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of older people currently living in Coffs Harbour after migration from either inland or major urban centres of Australia. Participants, through the use of photographs, provide insights into their experiences of living in a community and of their personal and social life. The aim of this study is to reveal the potential and life experiences of older persons through their eyes.

Design: A convenience sample of 18 participants, 10 men and 8 women, aged between 62 and 79 years were asked to photograph settings in their current environment that were of importance to them. The participants were then asked, via in-depth interviews, to explain the meaning and significance of the photographs.

Method: Participants were provided with a digital camera and asked to photograph settings that were of significance to them. No restrictions were placed on the number of photographs that could be produced. All photographs were coded and categorized. In depth-interviews were then conducted to ascertain how participant interacted with his or her environment, and whether this interaction was associated with past and present activities, including their experience of moving to Coffs Harbour.

Findings: The data reveals that participants mostly included photographs about their dwelling, followed by culture and beach. Females were more likely to include photographs of people and places for social gatherings. Males tended to include photographs associated with their particular interests or hobbies. Another important finding was that the participants wanted to review their lives and *desired meaningful roles in their present community*. They did not conform to present stereotypes of ageing. Participants were particularly concerned with maintaining their independence, pursuing physical and intellectual activities and taking steps to stay

healthy. All participants were concerned with the welfare of their children, or the next generation if they had no offspring. Some had taken up voluntary helping roles, many also supporting their own children with their difficulties in life. The activities of the participants were motivated by the perceived possibility of pleasure to be derived from the activity rather than the necessity of the activity. This pleasing of one's self, a freedom to choose, was seen as one of the advantages of retirement. The findings also revealed there was usually a long period, sometimes many years, when potential migrants fantasised about living in Coffs Harbour before turning the fantasy into a reality. The reasons for migration included: the moderate climate, the more relaxed lifestyle, the relatively inexpensive housing, the availability of recreational pursuits, and in some cases, nearness of family members. However, the participants revealed that there were unanticipated deviations from the fantasy that required making adjustments to their original plans. In the interviews two qualities were observed and named – 'conflicting statements' and 'apparent arrogance'. Conflicting statements, where one statement was followed shortly with another of opposite meaning, are interpreted as indicating a bipolar catastrophe in the participants. Apparent arrogance is the dismissive refusal to consider new or different ideas.

Conclusion: The post retirement group of older people is at the threshold of a new until now rare, level of human development. The negative stereotypes of growing older in society will need to be combated. This will require a cultural shift that will run contrary to the present preoccupation with economic values. The participants in this study have already shown the desire to make these cultural shifts, where pleasures in the tasks of life are important. Public information systems must be configured to support such efforts. Much more work must be done with older people to better understand their living experiences so that society can better explore and utilize their potentials.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1	Showing percentage of photographs of people or animals falling in each category by gender	96
Figure 4.2	Showing percentages and number of participants whose photographs are classified by the category	98
Figure 4.3	Showing percentages of participants whose photographs are classified by category and gender	98

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Characteristics of euclidian geometry and fractal geometry	20
Table 3.1	Male sample	81
Table 3.2	Female sample	81
Table 3.3	Showing the categories of content photographs	93
Table 3.4	Showing categories of settings	93
Table 7.1	Showing conflicting qualities in statements by male participants	220

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 3.1	Jane's house	88
Photograph 3.2	Rocky's Tower	90
Photograph 3.3	Sikh Temple	92
Photographs 5.1-5.2	Showing Roy's house and backyard	114
Photograph 5.3	Roy's home workstation where he designs and creates signs	115
Photograph 5.4	Roy at play or work?	117
Photograph 5.5	Neighbourhood Centre where Carmen worked for a number of years.	128
Photograph 5.6	Lifeline Headquarters Coffs Harbour	128

Photograph 5.7	Coffs Harbour Marina	129
Photograph 5.8	The Community Village where U3A classes are held	131
Photograph 5.9	Gym that Carmen joined	131
Photograph 5.10	Carmen's Garden	133
Photograph 6.1	Hiram's hobby farm showing the wetland	143
Photograph 6.2	Carmen's house	147
Photograph 6.3	Laura's home in a caravan park	148
Photograph 6.4	Piano's house in western part of Coffs Harbour	149
Photograph 6.5	Gemma's tiny back yard	150
Photograph 6.6	Roy working at his hobby	161
Photograph 6.7	One of Anushka's peaceful scenes	167
Photograph 6.8	Piano's photograph of his favourite instrument	177
Photograph 6.9	Guitar's present studio which he hopes to update	179
Photograph 6.10	Kate aged 79 at her computer	181
Photograph 6.11	Love jobs' \$600 - \$800 worth of signage	185
Photograph 6.12	Tryer's second car that is used to transport Meals on Wheels food	186
Photograph 6.13	Guitar's putting green that he built himself	189