

Discussion Group Topics:

- 1. The Time for Daring.** (This will be a women-only discussion.) Our years since graduation parallel the movement that supposedly led women from constraints to equality and self-assertion. As educated women, as Radcliffe women, were we ourselves successful -- empowered, as they say, and emboldened? If not, were we held back by a lack of opportunity, or also by a lack of daring?

And what are we doing now with what could be, in spite of losses and liabilities, the most liberating time of our lives? Whatever we want, this is the *time for daring* – to do the Iditarod or just travel alone, to get a book published or finally written. If not now, when? What can anyone do to us at this point? What do we want to do and how do we do it?
- 2. Exploring Unlived Potential and Neglected Aspects of Ourselves.** Growing older brings the advantages of more life experience, less pressure to conform, and a greater longing to give expression to potential we may have downplayed or even neglected. Does the present moment enable us to respond creatively to our gifts, uniqueness, and unfinished business in order to live fully? If so, what interests, aspirations, or modes of creative expression do we want to pursue? What friendships, challenges, or causes from the past are we drawn to? And what new interests, hopes, and dreams excite and inspire us? How can we encourage one another to pick up neglected threads from the past and how may we support each other in following new interests?
- 3. Avenues for Creativity and Social Usefulness.** With the wisdom gained from life experience, many of us have plenty of “free” time and no patience for pointless activity. What ways have we found to improve civic life and engage in our communities? How are our avocations fulfilling our need to be creative? Has anyone tried self-publishing? Do we move from “occupying our time” to “investing our time?” With greater experience of life might we not have even more need for self-expression and more to offer?
- 4. The Place of the Arts in our Lives.** This is a time for the musicians and artists, photographers and poets, craftspeople and dancers – whether professional or amateur – to share what inspires and frustrates. Perhaps a continuous projection of art created by classmates. We will demonstrate and discuss how the arts can be used to enrich ordinary life as we age, not necessarily as professionals, but even as neophytes and those who have gone back to the artistic experiences of their youth.
- 5. Technology -- Its Effects on Our Lives:** Do you use e-mail? Texting? Facebook? Twitter? PDAs? How do you feel about the demise of print news and books, and the rise of the Kindle? Are these technologies making you feel closer to others or more distanced? Whether you’re experiencing information overload or a heightened ability to communicate, share your perspectives with others.
- 6. The Re-arranged Life.** All of us have suffered losses and “lessening.” Most have lost parents, and some have lost partners. The kids have left home. Many have retired while some of us still work, though usually not on a fast track. Instead of buying more, we’re throwing things out. Fewer marathons; more medications; a different physical presence; and increased fears. It’s all disquieting, but also very freeing. In good company, we’ll talk about how we have coped and how we intend to go on coping.

7. **Adjusting to Changes in Living Arrangements.** Do you care for aging parents? Have your children returned to the ancestral home? Are you part of a cooperative living system or preparing for facilitated care? Maybe you're planning to age in place. Talk with others who have created or are thinking about alternative living arrangements.
8. **Facing Life with Humor and Grace.** As we age and perforce confront all of the inevitable losses in store, losses of functions, of memory, of physical abilities and acuties, and of companions, friends, supports, we need all the help we can muster to contain and endure such diminution. One of the best and most readily available is that of humor: to find ways to generate laughter over what cannot be avoided, and to solace ourselves and those around us with the distance and perspective that humor can provide. Examples of humor germane to these issues will be provided, but it is hoped they will lead to a serious discussion of the uses of humor in later life, as well as to the sharing of humor itself. Although not absolutely required, a sense of humor would be useful.
9. **The Aging Body – Creative Aging.** Are you finding that your body is no longer your friend? What strategies have we developed for maintaining and even extending our health, flexibility, and stamina?
10. **Facing Mortality and Planning for an Elegant Exit**
What could be said to be elegant of death and old age? A person fearful or weak or lonely or confused is in pain, and pain, whether physical or spiritual, is not elegant. These states are symptoms of disconnection from family, friends, and the world, that is, from life. Life encompasses death, and pain, and also joy and elegance.

How can we learn to be proud, serene, or even happy, as we approach the end of our individual lives?

We have invited other classmates who have sustained devastating losses of all varieties and who have learned to deal constructively with the pain, including the fears engendered. There are tricks and methods that some of us have learned, and that is what this discussion group will initiate or continue for its participants. Share your perspectives, plans, and wisdom about such practical topics as end-of-life care, living wills, and health care proxies, and about inspirational topics such as acceptance, pride and joy. We will learn from each other how to plan for an elegant exit.