

Autumn Gold: The first Men Beyond 50 workshop:

New lifeskills, new friendships, new inspiration



The weekend of November 11 – 13 at Hazel Hill Wood was a big occasion for me: the first weekend workshop, in fact the first open event of any kind, for the Men Beyond 50 project. After 13 months of working on faith that men beyond 50 are a valid category, a group who really do have shared needs and challenges, the theory was going to be tested.

The weekend was fully booked, and we had a group of 19 men ranging from age 49 to 77. Quite a lot of us had some experience of men's group, some current, some many years back. But many of us commented that it felt new, different, quite special, to be in a gathering specifically for men over 50.

No words can fully convey the deep emotions, the rich sense of companionship, the interplay between men of this age and a wood in its golden Autumn glory, but I'm going to try, because I hope that this event will encourage many more men beyond 50 to gather and explore how they can learn, heal, grow and have fun with each other.

What this weekend amply confirmed is that turning 50 is a gateway into a whole new stage of life for many men. This is a time which includes loss, confusion, and huge gifts, including the chance to start over in your sense of who you are and what you want from life now. Being in a group just of men beyond 50 had special qualities which felt new to us, including safety, witnessing, wisdom, and a word that was used a lot across the weekend: fellowship. Sometimes it seemed that the quieter men in the group felt the darker qualities, whereas the more lively, talkative ones felt the lighter qualities. It was touching that, as the weekend went on, the quiet ones spoke more, the talkative ones listened more, and there was a beautiful recognition of how each can help the other, and how each is part of the whole picture.

There was a range of painful feelings shared by many men in the group: being lost, isolated, in unfamiliar territory, coping with a sense of declining energy and power, weary of meeting others'

needs yet unsure of their own. Alongside this, many men talked of the gifts of this time of life, recovering a sense of freedom, new explorations, realising how precious every present moment is, and enjoying it to the hilt. I believe one of the great questions of these maturing years is how men can encompass both of these realities, which are only seemingly in opposition to each other.



Autumn Gold at Hazel Hill

Another theme emerging from the group was a shift of focus: for men in their 30s and 40s, individual achievement and the couple relationship are dominant, but a realisation emerged through this weekend that the flavour of the 50s, 60s and 70s is different. Here, groups and communities become more important, both in giving and receiving. We talked a lot about what it means to become an elder: we felt that the elders of a tribe are typically a peer group of older men or women who hold collective wisdom for the tribe, who speak out on what values really matter, and who serve the tribe in many ways. On our weekend, we felt at the start of this journey into elderhood: we have more to do to find our personal presence and our group presence, hoping that as we find them, we can be of

service to the wider community.

In a time of overwhelming problems on the social, environmental and economic fronts, could it be that the elders have the collective wisdom and energy to make the difference? This is a question I want to explore in some of the Men Beyond 50 work next year.

The feedback from participants in the group was hugely positive: about the many benefits they had gained from the weekend, about being in a group of men beyond 50, and about [Hazel Hill Wood](#) as a venue for such events. The leaders of this group, Alan Heeks, Max Mackay-James and Robert Osborn, will be leading a similar workshop at Hazel Hill on July 6 – 8, 2012: click [here](#) for details. Alan Heeks and Ger Murphy will be running a workshop in Ireland in June 2012, click [here](#) for details. The Men Beyond 50 project are planning a number of other events for next year: email us at list@menbeyond50.net to receive updates on these.

Tags: Hazel Hill, Maturing men, Men's groups, Events, Support, Nature, Friends

Posted by Alan

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