

Warrior to Elder: We're doing it for the tribe

Learning from my own workshop

For some time I'd been feeling how great it would be to have a big gathering of men, so I was delighted when the UK Men's Network organised one in Brighton recently, and extra glad when they asked me to lead a three-hour workshop at the gathering.

I chose the theme Warrior to Elder: partly because it would be teaching what I need to learn. Since I turned 60, four years ago, I've been hoping to evolve from heroic struggle/warrior mode into elderhood. The two questions we explored in my workshop are both pressing for me: what *is* elderhood, and how to move into it.

I'm glad to say that everyone in my workshop, including me, got some really good insights from it. Here are a few of those I can share without breaching confidentiality.

My view was confirmed that there's no one-size-fits-all version of elderhood. One general principle may be to fulfil parts of yourself, and qualities, not expressed earlier in your adult life. If you've been quiet and reclusive, this could be a time for active leadership. If you've done a lot of leading, consider shutting up and doing nothing for a while.

We realised that older men can do a lot for younger adults: firstly, by witnessing and hearing them without trying to fix their problems; secondly, by showing them that one can be happy without knowing all the answers or being on top of situations. All this is part of 'elder wisdom'.

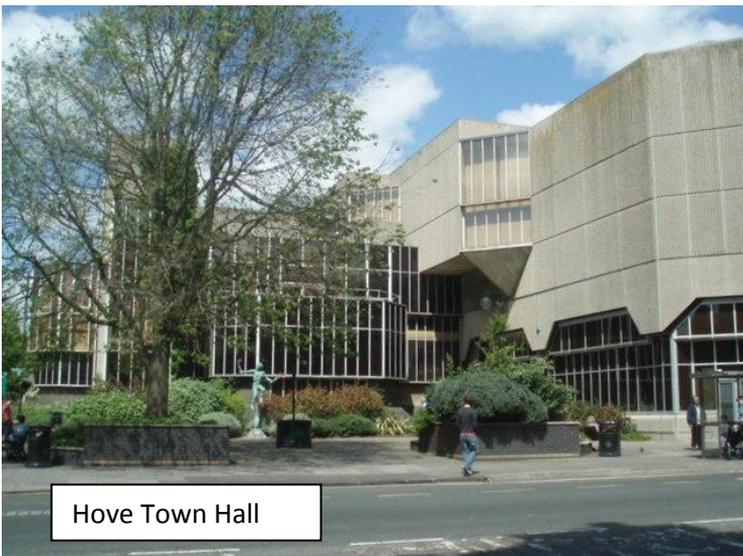
Many men now aged fifty-plus were touched by the idealism and excitement of the late 1960's. Many of us then had naive ideas about how to achieve our big hopes, like a society based on love not money. Now that so many of us who were touched by those times are elders, maybe we can find wiser ways to manifest ideals that are still valid.

When I ponder rising pressures of our times, like the impact of climate change, service cuts, crop failures, I see a big need for the elders, men and women, to find their voice. Our society needs the elders to embody the wisdom and values to thrive despite such pressures: for example by collaborating, sharing resources, and valuing quality of life more than quantity.

Some of my blind spots about elderhood were gently pointed out to me during my workshop. For example, how valuable humour, and the roles of fool and trickster can be at this age. They can help us lighten up about the problems of ageing, and they're powerful ways to reach younger generations.

I was also reminded that my emphasis on shipwrecks and re-invention may suggest that men beyond 50 don't have much fun: whereas this can be a deeply happy time, as it often is for me. But I can get too serious and earnest, and it's good to be called on that!

Tags: Elderhood, Personal development, Alan's adventures



Hove Town Hall