

INTERVIEW WITH IDA ROLF - November 26, 1977

R: What would you like to know about aging? How you do it?

Q: I'd like to know how you call yourself -- what words do you use to describe the place you are in your life right now?

R: I don't know. I'm not at all certain of your question.

Q: Do you say I'm an old woman, I'm an older person, I'm a ... just how do you talk about it?

R: I am an old woman.

Q: I'm an old woman.

R: I am an old woman. But I don't talk about it; I just go on putting one foot before the other so to speak. Because I've done that all my life and I haven't gotten any new pattern.

Q: How long have you been an old woman?

R: Oh, I don't know. That's an impossible question.....

Q: You have no sense of when.....

R: No.

Q: You would have made that transition?

R: No, no -- I made the transition when I was able to look in the mirror and see myself as an old woman.

On the telephone I don't sound like an old woman; is that what you're going to say?

Q: Here you don't sound like an old woman either.

R: I know, I don't sound like it now. That's why I say -- you say when did you make the transition -- I haven't made a transition. All you have to do is close your eyes and you don't have the sense of an old woman.

Q: That's true, that's true. Do you have a sense of other stages -- of when you grew up -- of when you were grown up --

R: You see, so many of the people in your generation do such a lot of looking at themselves. In my generation we just plain didn't do it. We rolled up our sleeves and we went to work. And we were busy with what we were working on.

Interruption when secretary Robin came in. She said she brought some persimmons.

To Robin: See if the girls would like a persimmon. Maybe this one who asks such embarrassing questions -- you should give her a persimmon.

Q: That seems like a good match.

R: But I really feel this very strongly. If I were growing up and growing older now, I'd probably be looking at myself every step of the way trying to find out what's changed and how it's changed and why I've changed and whether I like it. We didn't do that. We kept working. I personally recommend that as a personal philosophy, that you keep on working on something outside yourself.

Q: Can you describe how it's different now for you, being an older woman?

R: No.

Q: Physically, or

R: Physically I'm spending my time in a hospital. in a clinic, but aside from that, No.

Q: You don't find emotional differences?

R: Not particularly. I'm still accepted by my group, as Sydney will tell you. I'm not only accepted but I'm very much valued by my group.

Q: Oh, yes. So you don't face what many older people do. being isolated.

R: No, fortunately not. Fortunately I've never had to face that.

Q: You can remain active.

R: Fortunately my sons still accept me — not as an older woman that they've put in the corner of the shelf that nobody should look at.

Q: Are you content?

R: Again, you're asking me the kind of question that isn't mine.

Q: It's the same one as before, isn't it.

R: Yes, you're trying to get me to get emotional over this thing and I refuse to do it. Because it's contrary to my philosophy of well being. I think the problem with this generation is that they pay too much attention to what's going on inside their skins and not enough attention to what's going on outside their skins.

Q: So that's really what you were saying before — keep working, keep yourself focused someplace else.

R: That's right.

Q: Except that you say that you don't see well.

R: I do not see well. I am a legally blind citizen of the state of New Jersey.

Q: So there are some ways that you know that it's different.

R: (Pause) Oh, of course it's different. There's no question about it being different. When you ask a question about how it is different you're asking a question about attitude. My attitude still is, I got work to do. And let's get on with the job.

Q: Do you find that your age brings you any advantages?

- R: No, I wouldn't say so, not unless you consider being wheeled around in a wheel chair an advantage. When you go through the airport it's a great help.
- Q: Are there things you have learned — and learned not to do any longer ? (Paraphrase, I said it long windedly).
- R: You mean I've finally learned I shouldn't do this ?
- Q: Well, or learned to do without certain.....
- R: Oh, yeah, there's no doubt about that, and there's also no doubt that as you grow older you learn not to value certain things so much — not to value certain emotional responses so much. I think they're pretty nearly covered in that song from — "I'm so glad I'm not young anymore", if you remember that song. Maurice Chevalier — oh, it was a wonderful song. From Gigi.
- Q: So there are some things you're glad that you're not having to put up with.
- R: Oh, yes, no, no. I'm sorry you can't get a great big emotional reaction from me.
- Q: Oh, I don't need a great big emotional reaction. I'm exploring. I don't know and it interests me. Maybe people won't have anything to say.
- R: Well, a great many people are much more interested in themselves than I am. If you're interested in yourself you'll have things to say, but if you're interested in what you're doing you won't have things to say.
- Q: Do you wish you were younger ? Would you like to be younger ?
- R: Not particularly. I'm willing to quit... today, more than willing to quit.
- Q: Do you think that your generation, yourself, as an old woman is very different from your mothers ?
- R: Well, you see I'm much older than my mother or any of that older generation ever was. They died in their sixties and I'm in my eighties. So the thing is not comparable.
- Q: I guess also I would be very different from you because you're so active — professionally — more so than women of an older generation were.
- R: Yes, of course. There were only a handful of women in that older generation that were outstandingly active professionally. Most of them you know by name, I know. Carrie Nation (laughs).
- Q: Is your day now very different than it was, say 40 years ago ?
- R: Yes, it's a lot less. I put less things..... I have to put less things in it. Sure it's a lot different. And there are more demands made on me.
- Q: So you have more to do, and are trying not to do so much at the same time.
- R: Yes, that's right.
- Q: That's a neat trick.

R: Yes, if you can pull it off, its a neat trick.

Q: Are there things you miss ?

R: Sure, of course.

Q: Could you say.

R: I miss my little kids growing up and all the things that went with a family. I miss being the head of the Thanksgiving dinner parade. I miss many of the responsibilities that have been taken off my hands. Of course.

Q: You say of course, but I don't know.

R: Well, you'll find out.

Q: Well, I hope so. I hope I get to live as rich and full and long a life as you.

Q: Are there things you look forward to ?

R: Couple of million dollars.

Q: Oh ?

R: An endowment for the Institute, or something like that, which would ease the problems of working — not merely my working but everybody's working. I don't think I'm ever going to get them, but you asked me what I looked forward to.

Q: Are there other things ?

R: That encompasses a wide range, lady, a wide range.

Q: O.K. Would you like me to narrow it a little ?

R: No, well, I don't care, you can if you like.

Q: I guess I was thinking about events in your own life.

R: No, I just take them the way they come.

Q: Are there things that you might have done differently — as you now look back ?

R: That's a question that I don't know that I can answer.

Q: Does that not interest you, or is it something you wouldn't have thought about ?

R: I don't know. As I say, it's a question I don't see any great sense in worrying about.

Q: I think I know your answer to this — maybe I'll ask it and answer it too. When you were a young woman, did you ever try to imagine what it would be like to be old ?

R: No. I never believed I would become this old because no one in my family has ever gotten to be this age.

Q: Oh, really ?

- R: I would have considered seventy at the far end of the line.
- Q: Does your dying interest you ?
- R: My dying, oh, casually, yes. I have no horror about it. I wouldn't cross the street to keep from dying. Naturally, at the end of the line it interests you.
- Q: Do you have any sense of preparing for your death ?
- R: Well, there are a lot of people that are amusing themselves trying to look at that whole dying question. I'm not one of them. I know that they're there and I know that they're talking and I know that I don't know what conclusion they came from and I know that I don't care what conclusion they come to. And as far as I'm concerned, I'm a good old victorian. When the reaper comes, I'm right here, and that's all.
- Q: I believe you. You're very convincing.
- Laughter.
- Q: Well, are there things I should have asked you ?
- R: Well, to be perfectly frank, nobody has ever interviewed me with this type of question before. They're always interested in what is Rolwing; well how did it get that way; well, why did you do it that way and so forth. . . . so that a very personal set of questions, such as you've presented, has never been presented to me before.
- Q: Maybe you have answers about the kind of thing I'm interested in and that my questions aren't getting that information. Do you have any sense of that ?
- R: What are you interested in ?
- Q: In what it's like to be older, how it is for you. . . .
- R: I think the whole secret of how it is to be older depends on how much energy you have within that skin, and how much energy is controlled by this thing you call your personality. The whole thing rests on that and is the expression of that. I think any answer that doesn't take that into consideration is not an answer.
- I realize that there aren't many people who will give you that answer, but as far as I'm concerned, no other answer has any meaning.
- Q: It sounds to me like you have a great deal of energy within that skin.
- R: Most people think so.
- Q: Do you ?
- R: Not enough.
- Q: That's really all I have to ask you about.
- (Long pause)
- R: (To Sydney). Isn't it interesting that she never asked the question of how do you think you got that way ?
- R: That was the question I was expecting her to ask all the way along.

Sydney: How do you think you got that way — old, you mean?

R: No, having a lot of energy, and still having a lot of energy, and, uh. . . . that was the question I was listening for.

Q: Do you have an answer? I mean, if you have an answer, I'd love to have it.

R: Oh, sure, I've a lot of answers for it. I've spent my life preparing people to have more energy — showing people how to live so that they have more energy. I've spent my life doing it. And if you know anything about Rolfing, you know that that's so. I would have been in a wheel chair 20 years ago, and really in a wheel chair. Now I'm in a wheel chair and out of a wheel chair. But I would have really been in a wheel chair 20 years ago if I hadn't had some of those answers.

(Long pause)

Q: How long has that been part of your life. . . .

R: 40, 50, 60 years — 60 years, probably.

Q: So you've lived by what you've been teaching other people to do, and that's what. . . .

R: Certainly. Certainly.

Q: Just the energy for your work too, must keep everything else high also.

R: Well, yes, this is certainly so.

Q: What you said at the beginning — about keeping hard at work.

R: Keeping your interest occupied. Not scattered. I think this is part of the story. Scattering your interest, you see, let's the level of interest drop.

Q: It's hard sometimes, not to scatter yourself. I find it hard not to scatter myself sometimes.

R: Well, perhaps you haven't had as promising a goal. This may be part of the answer.

Q: You had that, didn't you —

R: Yeah.

Q: Something you clearly knew you wanted to keep working at. Still have that.

R: So, I'm fortunate. I'm fortunate in many respects. It's very rare that a pioneer lives to see his work accepted to the extent that mine is. Very rare.

Q: For a long time, too.

R: No, not so long; let's say five years.

Q: And to know its going to go on for a long time.

R: Well, yes, undoubtedly it will go on for a long time. It might not always go on as Rolfing; it might go on. . . . somebody might grab the ball and run with it and call it something else but the work, the principles themselves will be going for several hundred years, no doubt about that.

- Q: That must give you a good deal of satisfaction.
- R: Well, if I sit down and try to find it, I guess I could have it, but there again you have ...roll up your sleeves and get to work philosophy, you know... interfering.
- Q: Do you spend much time on your work in terms of its own development now...are you looking for innovations, maybe, or.....
- R: Well, these innovations still keep coming, but they come quite spontaneously. I mean you don't go looking for them, all of a sudden there they are and you see them.
- Q: Just by keeping at work.
- R: By keeping at work and keeping your eyes open and seeing what's going on.
(Long pause)
- R: Can you think of anything more, Sydney?
...asks Robin the same. Robin mentions that she is still trying to increase her strength.
- R: No, I don't think that's so — all I'm trying to do is to not lose it.
- Q: Like Alice in Wonderland.
- R: Yeah.
- Q: You don't have a sense of increase.
- R: No, I think I would reject the notion that I'm going to ever be any higher than I have been. And I'm well content with that.
- Q: Is your family in New Jersey?
- R: Well, one of my sons and his family is in New Jersey, yes. One of them lives in Washington, D.C. Basically I'm an eastern woman.
- Sydney: To me it is just so unique for you to have pioneered the way you did; to me that's the question of how you got that way almost at age 20, but that seems so important in who she is today, as opposed to another person who hasn't done this; who has merely grown old, in more traditional just family patterns, but the uniqueness of Dr. Rolf is — I think as you put it, your father didn't want you to go to college...or something like this — I don't remember what it is.....
- R: Oh, that's not true. That's not true. My father sweated to get me through college. It happened at a point in his life when money was not easy, and he said I could do one of two things. I could either have a social life or I could go to college and have an intellectual one, but he would not stand for my having both.
And if I was going to go to college, that's where I put my attention. And that's where I did put my attention. No, I had no particular problems with my father. He would be a very proud man today.
- Q: Did he live to know about your therapy?
- R: No. He died when I was about 30 perhaps — a little under 30.

Q: And your mother — did she. . . .

R: The same, she died within 6 months of him. She knew that her life was finished and she had done what she was required to do and she was going on, and she went. They were about 65 — that's why I say I don't come from a long-lived family.

Q: So you attribute that difference in lifespan to your work.

R: Yeah, to my work, and what has been done for me. I've had a very great number of people taking a lot of trouble keeping me going down through the years. I have right now, including Peter Levine.

Q: I don't think I understand, in what way are you talking about ?

R: Well, they keep track of me — they call me up several times a day to see if things are going well, how are things at the clinic, is it going as it should be, and so forth and so on, and they do all kinds of taking care of me. A great many people.

Sydney: And a great many people all over the country and all over the world being in touch with new methods and health care, and getting new ideas, and there aren't that many people for most individuals that would be thinking of sharing. . . . and saying, I should be telling Dr. Rolf about this, this might be something that might be helpful. Most individuals don't have that many people looking after them and hearing about new things and good doctors and good methodologies.

R: So, I think this is probably a different pattern of growing old. . . . and most of the people you've been. . . . Margaret Mead might have something of the same story, I don't know.

Q: Yes, I think you're right, it is very different.

(Long pause)

R: Well, if that's all we've gotta talk about, I suggest we say goodbye.

Q: O. K.

Anna's note: In 1977, the Institute offices were still in Dick Stenstadvold's home and when I received this interview (with a note that simply said "For the historical files") I stuck it away in haste in a file. . . . thinking I would do something with it at a later time. Spring cleaning has again brought this interview to my attention, and I thought you all would especially enjoy reading it.

Certified Rolfer SYDNEY CLAIRE VILEN of Laguna Beach, California, was the person talking with Dr. Rolf.

The pencil sketch of Dr. Rolf was done by LINDA DROEGE of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was "taken" from a photograph taken by Rolfer RON THOMPSON of Tampa, Florida. Thank you all so very much!