GROWING IN MY GRAY
a memoir
by
Elizabeth Margoshes
PART I.
A Time To Dye

[Written & Drawn 2019 - March 2020, when I stopped for 2½ years. Finished PART I. in October 2022]
Apparently, I've become an old lady.

grey roots
forehead creases
"Ethel Mermans" marionette lines
labiosomthing folds
Tytanium hip
bulges

droopy eyelids
thinning hair
eye bags
age spots
downturned "angry" mouth
Various weird spots
These got lower.

Don't work so great.
Most of these external changes don't bother me. But there is one thing that drives me crazy—my gray hair. I've been dyeing it for years, but every time the roots grow back to a noticeable degree I flirt with the idea of going gray—

What do you think?

Hm... I just don't know.
Aside from the pain-in-the-ass of dyeing my hair and the god-knows-what effects of the chemicals, I have a FANTASY that it might be a “self affirming,” “healthy,” and “feminist” thing to show my “true self”!

Except I just can’t seem to make that LEAP to gray! For me (and on me), gray hair is still a painful SIGNIFIER of the inescapable MARCH toward DECREPITUDE, with which, SADLY and UNCOOLLY I am OBSESSED.
IN FACT, the worst thing about my getting old is that I've developed a SEVERE degree of HEALTH and DEATH ANXIETY. I spend WAY too much time PANICKING about all the terrible things that could be wrong with me at any moment.

- I'm not SWALLOWING right!
- My heart is beating too quickly!
- My HEAD feels too WARM!
- This BLOATING can't be NORMAL!
- What's this weird TINGLING in my neck?
- Is that a LUMP in my neck?
- My PANCREAS hurts! WAIT—where IS the pancreas?
- MY SPINE HURTS!
I’m mostly terrified of cancer, and try to avoid all mentions of it. But when I see a headline about it online I just have to click on it:

**The New York Times**

*It looked like a beer belly. It turned out he had a 77-pound tumor.*

I thought it was just my 20 beers a day!
For weeks after reading that article, I couldn't stop checking my stomach in the mirror.
When I was younger, I did have the occasional hypochondriacal crisis, but a phone call to a reassuring friend could get me out of it quickly.

Oh God, I cut my finger! What if I don't clot properly and I BLEED to DEATH?!

Oh, NO BIG DEAL! My niece's friend's husband's mother was bleeding from 4 orifices - she's FINE - you have NOTHING to worry about!
But, more recently, I've become really afraid of doctors: their ability to look inside you with their seemingly SUPERHUMAN POWERS of KNOWLEDGE and OBJECTIVITY.

I always got straight A's and the world seems totally LOGICAL.

Okay! Let's have a look.

Archaic pathogens ➔ Pestilential rot ➔ Oh God ➔ Tumorous fistules

Gown w/ opening to the back as instructed

Ludicrously still wearing socks + shoes
As a result, I find that I compulsively ask too many questions and doctors become annoyed with me. I've learned that you're only allowed one "volley" back and forth before they become completely disgusted with you:

So, you think it's a stomach virus?

That's what it appears to be.

Uh, you don't think there could be pancreatic or bile duct complications? When I Googled...

You can check out at the front desk.

Too anxious to spend more time coloring in.
AND ALARMING

The strange thing, though, is that I'm a therapist! A psychologist! I help people with their anxiety, often at the same time that I'm experiencing my own irrational fears. This makes me feel WEIRD and SECRETIVE.

Thinking the worst is a pattern you fall into.

I have this pain. I'm scared it's cancer!

Me, hiding my anxiety inside my Eileen Fisher separates.

Unsuspecting patient thinks I'm doing better than she is because I'm her therapist.

OH GOD, I have that exact same pain! Except mine probably is cancer!
Health anxiety isn’t my only problem. Throughout my life I’ve had many other fears. Although I don’t let it stop me, I’m afraid of travel. I always think a catastrophe will befall me in a strange place where I am unknown.

- Should we call for help?
- No, just walk around her.

Devrons-nous appeler de l’aide?
Non, il suffit de la contourner.
I have lots of social anxiety too. In my dating days, I suffered from massive fear of rejection. Although normally a highly verbal individual, when out with a man I often couldn't think of anything to say.

A man says: "So... what movies have you seen lately?"

A woman says: "Um, I... um... thing... well..."
And making friends has always been hard for me. The anxiety and fear of rejection usually makes socializing "not worth it."

This IS kind of like being with friends -- ISN'T IT?
OBVIOUSLY, as a therapist myself, I've sought treatment for my "issues," and I've been fortunate to have benefitted from MANY years of excellent psychotherapy with a NUMBER of therapists who have provided me with:

INCISIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Everything SCARES me.

Your physical symptoms are a METAPHOR for the damage you feel inside of you.
Emotional Understanding

I think there's something TERRIBLY WRONG with ME.

Given all that you've told me about your personal history and experience, it makes PERFECT SENSE that you would feel this way.

Interesting cultural artifact from trip abroad.
AND COMPASSION.

It all makes me so SAD -- and ANGRY! It wasn't my FAULT! -- WAS IT??

NO. IT WASN'T.
And all that therapy HAS HELPED!

FOR EXAMPLE, I fell in love with a

WONDERFUL MAN

who brings me

COFFEE

IN

BED

EVERY

MORNING!

(*I can only say “sweetie” ironically.*)
I HAVE
FULFILLING WORK

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

I FEEL BAD.

I understand.

You make me feel like a natural woman!

It takes a graduate degree to know when to say this.

Letting loose when work is done.
And a wonderful grown son

[redacted for his privacy]

-- And 2 lovely cats --

CARL  TORVALD
And some really good **FRIENDS**

**ONLINE** AND **I.R.L.**

Who tolerate me even though I rarely get together with them in person.*

*In Real Life
d*maybe they prefer it??
But I am still afraid of so many things—but especially, THIS.
Of course it's occurred to me that maybe I need another pass through therapy -- like a sculptor continuing to shape his work to get the details more and more PRECISE...

...But all my therapists are DEAD!
WHO COULD I GO TO NOW?

Someone my own age who presents themself as having some special wisdom?

Or a younger therapist who just doesn’t get how to deal with the horrors of aging?

Life is about meaning and purpose.

I have to pee again.

It must be frightening to be old.

Glad it’s not me!

Mid-century modern coffee table bought in 1950

Mid-century modern coffee table bought on Etsy in 2022
Going back into “psychodynamic” therapy just doesn’t appeal to me. But I have, from time to time, tried other types of treatment for anxiety disorders, such as:

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THERAPY:

Your thinking is **IRRATIONAL**! If you look at this **LOGICALLY** you’ll realize that there is only a **1 in a THOUSAND** chance that your symptom will prove **FATAL**! So **STOP WORRYING**!

But all those “1’s” aren’t **EQUAL**! If *I’m* the 1, then I’m **DEAD**!
-- all sorts of supplements --

ALL RATED ★★★★★

which, sometimes, SEEMED to help, MAYBE, except did they really? or was it the PLACEBO effect? or NO cebo? or SORTA cebo?
I've tried **BIOFEEDBACK** to calm down my stress response directly -- and **NEUROFEEDBACK** to change my brain -- I even took courses and earned a **CERTIFICATE**!

**CERTIFICATE**

**BIOFEEDBACK SOCIETY**

---

**BRAIN STATUS**

- **CONSensual**
- **INDuced COMA**
- **NORMAL CHILL OUT**

**AIR OF CALM**

1 5 10 15 20
GREAT PROGRESS!
BREATHS per MINUTE

**AIR o' CALM by RESP-RITE.**

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**IT'S JUST 60-CYCLE NOISE! OF COURSE IT DIDN'T WORK!**
And of COURSE: Prescription Medications:

- **Abetterpam**
  - **Rx 7/4/15**
  - 160 mg

- **Snazzypam**
  - **Rx 7/3/15**

- **Lifteroff**
  - **Rx 7/2/15**

- **Takesommore**
  - **Rx 7/5/15**
  - 5000 mg

- **Calmazine**
  - **Rx 7/6/15**

- **extra mgs. This! help**
  - **Rx 7/1/15**

They often WORK! Until they DON'T.
I've also tried the hippest, grooviest technique (or, as they say, "practice"): MINDFULNESS. Except that focusing on your body doesn't make you less anxious when it's your **body** that you're anxious **ABOUT**!

Now pay attention to your breath...

Oh god, how many breaths do I even have LEFT?
"But hey, "you're thinking, "you ARE REALLY OLD!"
Of course you're concerned with illness and death!"
And, to a certain extent, you're RIGHT!

"I just had 2 CT scans, 3 MRIs, and an ultrasound and they still don't know what's wrong!"

"Everything is STIFF!"

"WHAT? I CAN'T HEAR YOU!"

"Is it ROBERT Shakespeare? Clyde Shakespeare?" "MICK??"

opening to the back
Also, at ANY age, isn’t fear of death NORMAL? Ernest Becker, an anthropologist, wrote a book called The Denial of Death*, which academics love. He argues that the ills of the individual and society itself can be reduced to the terror of death -- and, thus, its denial:

Man is literally split in two. He has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever.

If a person admitted this utter lack of control, that death lurks at every breath, and let it rise to consciousness, it would drive him to fear and trembling, to the brink of madness.

[* first published in 1973]
So then, is my anxiety just a sign that I am more “woke” than the majority of my fellow humans, who live their lives in a delusional fantasy that, since everything seems fine for the moment, why worry about the future? And getting old is significant just because it brings the inevitable realistically closer?
And I mustn’t forget that there are also cultural factors at play:

I am a New York City Jew coming from a long and glorious Eastern European tradition of pessimism and dread!

Lenny Bruce

Larry David

Franz Kafka

Woody Allen

Philip Roth

Richard Lewis

“Funny”—no women!

We were making dinner, taking care of the children, doing the laundry, and god only knows what else...
OKAY, then, FINE! I have good reason to be scared. But other people my age and of my culture seem to have a MUCH BETTER ATTITUDE than I do!

AGE is just a NUMBER!

LIFE is a BLESSING!

Who's for PICKLEBALL?

Live Laugh Love

[I traced this picture; it's by "BouLARlIs" on deviantart.com]
Is there anything left to do about my anxiety? Well, there is ONE THING that I WANT to do, and it is THIS:

GROWING IN MY GRAY
a memoir
by
Elizabeth Margoshes

I want to tell my life story -- to YOU.

WHY?
Because I have the idea that telling my life story, including how all this ANGST developed, would be THERAPEUTIC for me, and maybe for others too, and, and, and, and ...
because I crave ATTENTION!
Whereas, so far, I've portrayed myself as an anxious, phobic, socially avoidant, introverted person (all true):

There is another side to me:
THE PERFORMER

[clever retort]

[slightly irreverent comeback]

[not-bad witticism]
For example, in school, I was always THE CLASS CLOWN.

Mr. Silizhol, my 9th grade social studies teacher:

CLASS! What is the Middle East's greatest natural resource?

SAND!

Oh, you're in big trouble now, Missy!

SHIT!
And I've written songs and performed them, and have done some **STANDUP COMEDY**.

**WELCOME TO THE DUPLEX (1990)**

The night before the serial killer Ted Bundy’s execution, he was visited by his fiancé! A convicted murderer has a better social life than a single woman in New York City!
So now I have a fantasy of telling you all about my life, including everything that went wrong, but also the parts that are HILARIOUS and HEARTWARMING, and we will all LAUGH and CRY and HEAL TOGETHER, and I will be so BELOVED, and my life will be WONDERFUL, and all the BAD STUFF I went through will turn out to have been COMPLETELY WORTH IT.

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**Instagram**

1,000,000,000 FOLLOWERS

You're FINE as you ARE

❤️ ○ A billion likes

**TikTok**

We're ALL screwed up!

1,000,000,000 FRIENDS

Do The Angst-Step!

It's the LATEST DANCE CRAZE
But when I pick up my tablet and pencil, I FREEZE—and all I can think of are **OBSTACLES:**

**OBSTACLE: I CAN'T DRAW!**

If graphic memoirs by Alison Bechdel, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Roz Chast exist in the world, who am I to think I have a place in that world?
OBSTACLE: I'm a psychologist

My work is supposed to be DEEP and THEORETICAL, like that of these BRILLIANT FEMALE PSYCHOLOGISTS:

Darlene Ehrenberg  Beatrice Beebe  Jessica Benjamin

They all have BIG IDEAS (+ BIG HAIR!)
OBSTACLE: How much of my TRUE HISTORY can I reveal without being CAST ASUNDER by my fellow humans?

COROLLARY: There are some people who might be very SAD to read about some of the things I've gone through.
OBSTACLE: My FEELINGS toward others aren't always so NICE.

I just read your memoir--I didn't know you HATED me!

That's not what I MEANT!

or WAS it?
OBSTACLE: Why do I think the story of my life would be interesting when I am just another privileged white woman?

I have access to excellent goods and services.

THE BEST MEDICAL CARE...

and the feeling that I can walk around in (relative) safety.

Enjoy your day, Ma'am!

UM, Thank you, Officer.

Policemen love me.

CATCH OF THE DAY
Farmed in the purest water STOLEN from poor communities of indigenous peoples

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SKIN LOTION
Guanoteed Safe
Rest Assured

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MEDICARE
MIDDLE CLASS
WHITE LADY

SUPER
SUPPLEMENTAL, Inc.
WITH EXTRA SCANS

$58,412,397,264R

although obviously it scares the hell out of me)
I'm writing a memoir!

I wrote this memoir.

Growing Up in My Gray Balam, a Memoir
by Elizabeth Mungall

AWK! My Life With Parrots: a memoir by...?

Our Book Club wrote a memoir.

My memoir just won a prize!

I wrote a memoir.

A POCIGANT LIFE, if I don't say so myself: A MEMOIR
by ME

Best Memoir

Horrible things happened but now I sort of get it: A MEMOIR
COROLLARY: If it HASN’T been done already, it probably shouldn’t be done by ME.

Here I am, writing about myself, with the implication that my problems and feelings are “relatable” — because they have a certain UNIVERSALITY — when it has been brought to the attention of many of us privileged people that problems in living are also quite SPECIFIC, in terms of class, race, gender, and other characteristics that remain UNDERREPRESENTED. So maybe the middle-class white lady should STFU? Can’t we ALL have a voice? Your voice perpetuates certain “norms” and contributes to the difficulties others have of being heard. OK, BOOMER! Younger person who knows more about this than I do.
So, in sum, my memoir could be terrific or it could suck. Terrific, sucks, terrific, sucks, back and forth, in a perpetual oscillation between glory and shame.

And, therefore, I remain stuck. It's an exhausting way to live.
For those of you following along with your copies of *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding personality structure in the clinical process* I am describing “narcissistic personality organization”:

The term “narcissistic” refers to people whose personalities are organized around maintaining their self-esteem by getting affirmation from outside themselves, and supports to self-esteem, or hypochondriacal preoccupations. Narcissistically structured people are excessively self-preoccupied, afraid of falling apart, of precipitously losing their self-esteem (e.g., when criticized), and morbid fears of death.

*by Nancy McWilliams, Ph.D.*
People with narcissistic personality organization depend WAY too much on the approval and reassurance of others in order to feel OKAY, "whole," "intact," healthy, smart, attractive, and whatever else they value.

YOU'RE IN PERFECT HEALTH!

WHEW!

Growing In My Gray: a memoir
by Elizabeth Massie

This is the BEST MEMOIR I've ever read!

You're the BEST WIFE I've ever had!
But the good feelings are, necessarily, temporary—because "The phone calls are coming from INSIDE THE HOUSE!"*

I'm afraid I have some BAD NEWS

OH GOD!

Growing In My Great A memoir
by My Mother

This memoir turned out to be DISAPPOINTING.

I just realized that you don't make me happy.

The Other Shoe Must Always Drop

*paraphrased from the movie "When A Stranger Calls*
Note: Narcissistic personality organization is very common and must be distinguished from its more severe manifestation, **Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

in which an individual is so broken that they compensate with extreme grandiosity and a lack of empathy for others.
ANOTHER NOTE: Psychiatric diagnosis is tricky. It can be helpful, but also, putting people in grossly descriptive categories isn't nearly as scientific as people think.

I'm narcissistic with elements of obsessiveness, depression, and masochistic tendencies.

Cool! I'm a Libra with Pisces in retrograde and a house full of scorpions!

BUT

I DIGRESS...
**Question:** How does a person become like this? That's what my memoir is about— if I could only write it!

The central question seems to be: How can I navigate the perils of exposing my history (including not only events, but my true feelings), while allowing myself the actual rewards of expressing my authentic self?

**My Authentic Self**

The Scylla of letting out too much information leads to:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Envy
- Rage
- Self-hatred

The Charybdis of withholding information leads to:

- Lack of insight
- Boring vacuum
- Blah
- Constricted
- Stiff

Yawn

Why bother?
Oddly Enough, is this not the **SAME QUESTION** that comes up when one considers **GOING GRAY**? That is: How can I let my **AUTHENTICITY** reveal itself even if that **TRUE SELF** isn’t what we “normally” think of as **ATTRACTIVE**, or **APPEALING**? Well yes, it’s a very similar issue! **LUCKILY**, there are **MANY EXPERTS on GOING GRAY** that we can turn to for **ADVICE**!

Don’t worry— we’ve got you, um, covered!

We’re HAIR for you, GIRL!

We won’t give you the SHAFT

We’ve got LAYERS of wisdom!
"When it comes to gray hair, integrating a series of highlights and lowlights can help create a mixture of natural-looking colors for a multi-dimensional 'do that's full of movement. This modern technique allows you to embrace your grays in a stylish way."

--- L'Oreal, Paris
"Keep changing and trying out different styles."
--- Mara Kadish at Warren-Tricomi Salon

COMEDY

But then this really funny thing happened...

Tragedy

And then this very difficult thing happened...

Individuals with the anxious personality hold others in a higher regard, making it hard to trust. They are hyper-aggressive and libidinous, and their relationships can be difficult.

COLOR!

Chiaroscuro!

What a strange life it has been...

WRITING A MEMOIR

GOING GRAY

WAVY

PIXIE

TOP BUN
Gray hair can have a frizzier, more wiry texture than you may be accustomed to. Tame tresses by using a silk bonnet...at night and by getting sufficient hair-healthy nutrients in your diet... Be sure to also drink plenty of water.

--- Jonathan Colombini, Celebrity Hair Stylist

“Time Out For Hair Care”  “Time Out From the Memoir”
"It will be a shock to the eye and maybe some emotions will arise too, but focus on the end result."

--- Lauren E. Hack, Celebrity Colorist
And now, having “paid the toll” of pre-thinking every possible reason NOT to write my memoir, everything that could be wrong with it, and deferring to unseen but all-powerful authorities for “permission,” I think that I am finally ready to go forward -- I mean BACKWARDS -- to the BEGINNING...
more to come...