Book Review 19 The Third Chapter by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot

William C. McPeck

Personal Stories From the Third Chapter of Life, February 8, 2009, Rating: 3 Stars

The Third Chapter looks at the stage of life from ages 50 - 75. The author approaches this stage of life from her perspective as an educational sociologist. The book's premise is that life's third chapter is one of substantial growth and change. This change is based on learning. The author defines learning in this stage of life as not traditional learning, but as a mid-life process of "changing, adapting, exploring, mastery and channeling energies, skills and passions into new domains."

Through my recent work and study in this area, I have come to appreciate the importance the third chapter plays in our lives. While I recognized its importance, I missed its significance. According to the author, "The third chapter represents a significant and new developmental period in our culture, one that comes along only once a century."

The basis of the book is forty interviews conducted over a two year period. These interviews were conducted with both men and women between the ages of 50 and 75 who had made significant life changes during this period. Many of the interviewee's stories are told in great detail. Weaved into the book are a number of theoretical frameworks, dominated by the theoretical frameworks developed by developmental psychologist Erik Erickson and cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson.

While the individual stories bring value and insight to the book, at times I felt they were a distraction. Personally, I would have preferred seeing less depth in the stories presented and more of the author's interpretation of each story. Despite this drawback, I felt the book was definitely worth reading. Approaching this topic from an educational and sociological perspective was a new learning for me.

If, like me, you are a student of the third chapter of life, I would recommend you read this book as part of your learning process.