

Elder Wisdom

What is an Elder?

By Judy Tallwing McCarthy

As a child, I remember wishing I could grow up faster, that way I could be an elder, like my Grandmother. It was my biggest dream.

I think about her a lot now that I am an elder. My Grandmother was a very powerful woman, in a very quiet way. She never demanded respect or acknowledgement, but it was always given freely, by everyone who met her. Grandmother was a very powerful healer and always helped anyone who asked her to. She said her prayers daily with the rising and setting sun. part of every prayer was always "let me do no hurt or harm to anything on the earth."

When I think back on that I know it was that simple request which made her a great elder. Age does not make an elder! Wisdom, true wisdom, is what makes an elder. A true caring for others and for our

mother, the earth, makes an elder. A healthy respect for all life and for death makes one an elder. And, I believe, passing this philosophy of life on to others is also part of being an elder.

Recently, I've heard stories of persons who are demanding recognition as elders. Persons who have hurt others on their life path. To my mind, this is a very wrong thing. I watched when my Grandmother would go to ceremony, she never asked for the first serving of food, she never asked for the best place to sit, she never asked for others to take care of her. She would just go there, find how she could help and then quietly begin doing the work she felt she should be doing. Now, often there would be many who knew her and they would slowly get her to sit. Without great fanfare, they'd bring her food and usually had one of

the youngers around to make sure she was cared for.

I try very hard to be like my Grandmother. I'm 60 years old now. That's about ten years younger than my Grandmother when I was born. Everyday, I pray to do no harm, but I've also added to my prayer a request for mercy. I'm a human I make mistakes, but I'm trying always to be the kind of elder my Grandmother was. To everyone who reads this I ask, what kind of an elder are you going to be? true elder or one who only has aged.