

Chapter 4. Unpacking My Bags in Another Locale

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My Midlife Migration to Umbria

Elizabeth Wholey

My mother would have loved living in Italy, as I do. Like her own mother, who crossed the Pacific from California in 1915 to teach school in Hawaii, she was always ready for adventure and exploring.

Mom was born in San Jose but wound up on a farm in the countryside. My father, originally from Illinois, planted almond and walnut trees out in Contra Costa County, adapting to California's Mediterranean climate alongside our neighbors, who were of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Mexican and Japanese descent.

From this early exposure I was attracted to other cultures, country living and the outdoors. I studied medieval and Renaissance art history at UC Berkeley in the early '70s, then worked as a writer, editor, graphic designer and typesetter, always inside, always in offices. I owned a typography studio in Berkeley from the mid-'70s through 1992. On brief vacations, I headed for Europe.

At a certain point, my husband and I joined a partnership in Italy with other people from the Bay Area. The idea was to restore an ancient farmhouse overlooking a beautiful valley on the border of Umbria and Tuscany, rent it out to guests, and use it ourselves for vacations. I was in my late forties at the time.

In the Bay Area, my life was in flux. A huge fire in the Oakland hills had destroyed lives, businesses and homes, and a massive earthquake had brought down a section of the Bay Bridge. The economy had collapsed, too. Significantly for our business, Apple computers were appearing on our clients' desks. Now anyone with a Mac could create attractive documents; our graphics services were becoming obsolete. For a couple of years my employees made more money than I did and I had to borrow from the bank to make payroll.

An era was coming to an end, and I was ready for it. I wanted to be outside, to travel, see the world, learn another language, grow my own food and cook. My husband, Mark, wanted to make sculpture. Two employees took over the business, and on 30 December 1992, Mark and I drove out to a beach on the Pacific coast, made a bonfire, burned the company's business forms, and celebrated – just for the moment – our freedom.

Soon after that we got the call to come over to Italy, help restore the old Umbrian property, Altabella, and launch it as a rental. So we packed up and moved to Italy. My mother was encouraging, saying it's good you are doing this while you're still young.

After a few years we sold our share of the Altabella Properties to other Bay Area friends, but the partnership kept me on as its manager. Mark and I bought and restored another old house down in the valley, where I live now, but life in Italy is not for everyone. We agreed to divorce in 2004, and he returned to the States. I stayed on.

As the manager I've become the go-to person for our guests. I want them to be comfortable, to learn about and enjoy this lesser known part of Italy. It reminds me so much of the Napa Valley where my grandfather had a farm, except that here we have real castles, real Italian food and, best of all, the Italians themselves.

I've always found ways to support myself and have always enjoyed my work. I learned about gardening here from an English friend, and now, with local cooks, I cater and offer cooking classes. I became interested in how ancient foods such as farro, truffles and chestnuts sustained the populace through hard times and are still part of the local cuisine. That led to a Julia Child scholarship from the Culinary Trust in the U.S. and a recent, self-published book, *Sustenance, Food Traditions in Italy's Heartland*. I am now collaborating with a young sommelier on a book about Umbrian wines.

Like my dad, I have an orchard, and in the autumn I'll be planting more trees. I've also decided to turn my old stable into a living space that will increase the size of the house substantially. It seems crazy to be doing this at my age, sixty-eight, but it is a fun, creative undertaking.

Mom and I came to Florence together years ago. She never got to see my house in Umbria, but her grandchildren and great-grandchildren have, and her love of travel and adventure lives on, through us.

Elizabeth Wholey resides at Casa Ruspante, Umbertide, north of Perugia. Her websites are www.elizabethinumbria.com and www.amoresapora.com, and her book *Sustenance, Food Traditions in Italy's Heartland* (2012) is available through Amazon.*

*(*A pollo ruspante is a free-ranging chicken.)*



Elizabeth Wholey in 2014 [Photo by permission]

My Adventures on the Move

Lee Haworth

I don't think of myself as an older woman, although I am sixty-five. I have always been adventurous. I moved from Arizona to Berkeley, CA in the late 1960s, when I was nineteen. I earned a degree at UC Berkeley and eventually went to John F. Kennedy University for a master's in clinical psychology.

During the 1990s, I moved to Hawai'i and lived there seven years. I started working on my doctorate in clinical psychology, flying from Hawai'i to Santa Barbara monthly for three years. I moved to California, completed my PhD at Pacifica Graduate Institute in 2001 and moved to New Orleans, where I worked for the district attorney, before returning to California and becoming licensed as a psychologist in 2006.

I came to the Dominican Republic as a Peace Corps volunteer in 2012. I was the only older volunteer in my group. Peace Corps helped me settle in, yet I left the organization because I felt held back by its adherence to security regulations that did not take my maturity into account. I fell in love with the Dominican Republic and decided to stay.

I find public transportation to be one of the most positive aspects of living here. I've especially enjoyed the *guaguas* or local buses. When visitors came last year, we took *guaguas* from Cabarete to Las Galeras on the Samana Peninsula.

Carro públicos are another form of local transportation. Because passengers share rides, traveling is considerably cheaper than in private taxis and is very popular. In Santo Domingo, they run along major avenues and make it easy to get around the city. Some of the best times

I've had during my two years of living in this country have been riding in these *carritos*. They are an instant cure for loneliness!

The country's transportation system also includes a luxurious bus company, Caribe Tours, which I've taken to beaches on the opposite side of the island. At approximately \$8, these trips are a bargain. I also enjoy the metro, Santo Domingo's ultra-modern transportation system. Often I experience great generosity to older women. I let my hair grow white and am older than most women on public transportation. People go out of their way so that I am comfortable.

Motorcycles are among the most typical and useful means of transportation in this country. I take a motorcycle or *moto* for nearly all my short trips.

When visitors came from the United States, my neighbors were thrilled to the sight of three women in our sixties riding on the backs of *motos*. This memory is among the happiest of my time here.

I live in a poor area of Santo Domingo and rarely see another Caucasian woman in my neighborhood or talk to anyone in English. I spoke Spanish fluently as a child, when my family lived in Peru. My father was a mining engineer, and we lived in a mining camp high in the Andes until I was five, but I forgot my Spanish in a rush to fit in with Americans when we moved to the States. One of my goals in living here had been to relearn the language, but my neighbors speak a Caribbean-nuanced Spanish very rapidly, so I often understand little of what is said.

The upside to being an outsider in my neighborhood is that everyone notices me. I am hugged by women of all ages, and I smile, greet, and hug too. What a welcome change this is! As I began to age in the States, I felt myself slipping into invisibility. Here I am anything but invisible, which is possibly the most positive aspect of living here.

I volunteer at the local elementary school, helping the children with reading in Spanish. In reality, these children are my professors, as they pronounce every syllable and letter precisely rather than slur over them. My Spanish is at an intermediate level, good yet not ideal.

In September, I'll leave for Peru, and am planning to live in South America and work on my Spanish. I may decide to live in a smaller community rather than in a city like Lima because I live on Social Security, which has been adequate in the Dominican Republic.

I'll always cherish my two years here and my connections with the Dominican people, but the Dominican Republic is an island, and I'm ready to experience other countries.

Lee Haworth wrote this narrative before she moved to Peru in September 2014 and fulfilled her lifetime dream of visiting the mine at Quiruvilca, where her father worked as a mining engineer

when she was a child. She travelled from Trujillo into the Andes where the mine is located. A mining manager had located her father's reports penned in 1953 and she slept in a nearby mining camp, next door to the house in which her family had lived. Lee found the visit to be one of the most pivotal events of her life. She realized how adventurous her parents had been, and how much her early experience in Peru has affected her life.



Lee Haworth (2014)

[Photos by permission]

Worn Out Hip, Shoulder and Levis

Shirley Nicholas

In the past, popular wisdom ran to conservatism and caution in financial matters as well as physical exercise, sports, and even attitudes toward one's expectations of life. At least that was true for my parents and grandparents. Financial advisors recommended investments without risk. Doctors told us to stay out of the sun and to exercise well but not to truly tax ourselves. With the number of joint replacement surgeries these days I'm not so sure we're heeding their advice. The problem is that we look and feel much younger than our parents did. We don't want to sit safely on the front porch in rocking chairs living out the rest of our days. We want to go until we can't go anymore.

The adventurous path my husband Nick and I took began with the purchase of an uninhabited farmhouse in rural France. It hadn't been lived in for over fifty years. The structure was sound, but had never had indoor-plumbing or heating other than one walk-in fireplace for both heating & cooking. So many of the tales told by others of missing construction artisans and low estimates of the renovation costs are absolutely true. But naively and with great enthusiasm we plunged headlong into the "adventure". It took longer to complete, cost more than we thought and we still aren't speaking "*français*" fluently, but this endeavor is the happiest thing we've ever done.

This happiness almost overwhelmed me one morning while working outside. It began with temps in the forties [Fahrenheit] and a heavy ground mist from the river. After a couple of hours working under the trees, I took a break to shed my jacket, wipe the sweat out of my eyes and give my aching arms a rest. My neck and shoulders were killing me from the weight of the pruning shears, especially since all the pruning was over my head. I had forty-four large old walnut trees to do before José could come in and mow the grasses underneath. After all, I didn't want the poor man to lose an eye. So why was I grinning and why was my heart singing? I was thinking about how lucky I was to be sixty-seven years old, working my tail off and loving every minute of it ... IN FRANCE! How was I to know that, within the year, I'd need shoulder surgery to repair the damage, and Nick would need to have his right hip replaced because he'd worn it out by cutting up all that wood which filled the lower level of the barn from floor to ceiling?

Did we wish we hadn't done it? Not on your life! We just wished that we were ten years younger when we started. We thought that it would take two years to complete the renovation. Instead, it took three full years before we could finally even spend the night in the house. In France we tax our brains to attempt this new and difficult language. The way to do something is not always clear or intuitive and the complexity of appliances is sometimes unbelievable. But the history, the architecture, the beauty of the countryside and the endless number of places to see and visit will keep us returning and fully engaged and fascinated as long as we're able!

In conclusion, we feel that of course women in their seventies should be doing this! Live life to the absolute fullest, thoroughly engaged in the "here & now" with all the passion and strength you have and never mind the naysayers.

A California native, born in Palo Alto, Shirley Nicholas attended Menlo-Atherton High School and Pine Manor College in Wellesley, MA and married Nick, the boy-next-door. They raised three children and are the proud grandparents of eight. Married now for fifty-one years, Shirley and Nick currently reside in San Francisco and in the countryside of Southwest France.



Shirley and Nick in 2014



The Farmhouse

[Photos by permission]

Embracing *La Joie de Vie*

Wendy Shipnuck

I grew up as an anti-war activist in an affluent area near San Francisco where kids all seemed to be sent with a Eurail Pass to Europe after college. Not me -- I thought that would have been way too bourgeois! Instead, I went on to grad school and spent sixteen years active in socialist organizations before the dual responsibilities of caring for a child and helping ailing parents intervened. At age sixty-two, I have worked for decades investigating child abuse for the California Department of Social Services.

So my husband and I didn't make our first trip to Europe until I was nearly forty. I caught the travel bug. I was especially drawn to France and its beautiful, ancient stone villages strewn around the countryside. I was drawn to the people too – down to earth and lacking in pretension (that is, when not behind the wheel of a car). At the same time, they show quite a lot of enthusiasm when discussing politics. They aren't afraid of communists, socialists, trade unions nor, if the election of Francois Hollande is any indication, of the sexual revolution. As a nation, they struggle with issues of immigration and racism, as well as the ever-present threat from the right, but again, the discussion is open and spirited.

My mother had been abroad, but failing health kept her from doing a lot of travelling. She would make plans, but half the time would have to cancel because of illness. Then, a few years ago, after both my parents had passed away, my husband and I had the chance to buy a share into a charming medieval village house in the south of France. I'm writing this from the Commune de Vers-Pont-du-Gard now (no, not THAT kind of commune). We live for four weeks a year in a village with almost no English-speaking residents, so every day is a bit of a challenge. I'm becoming practiced in the art of the Gaelic shrug, that "whatever" gesture that seems to fit so well with my attitude at this stage of my life.

At home in California, I'm taking French lessons for the first time and have met a whole new circle of friends. We get together between classes and have study groups. It's so nice not to feel like a fool for making mistakes, because no one is judging or grading us. The friendships have been an unexpected bonus, since people often lose contact with friends when they retire or their kids have grown up and moved away.

Here in France, my husband has noticed that people are now letting me "run with it" when I open my mouth as opposed to second-guessing what I'm trying to say. I guess it really is true that expanding one's mind as we get older can help keep us feel younger. I'm reprioritizing what's important to me, and the prospect of retirement is looking better and better. Speaking of age, it is refreshing to see how French women approach aging here. There isn't this huge pressure to look younger, but at the same time, women don't necessarily change the style they adopted as younger women. I was told this point blank yesterday by a lithe thirty-

something sales clerk after wondering if the *très chic* skinny jeans I was trying on might be better suited for a younger woman. She simply said it's not about age, but about attitude, and how one feels inside. She was right (and I bought the jeans.)

Wendy Shipnuck lives near San Francisco. When not working or studying French, she spends most of her time walking her goofy English Setter in the East Bay hills.



Wendy Shipnuck (2014) [Photo by permission]

A New Chapter, at Seventy-Five!

Linda Jay

Well, surely I must be one of the oddest birds around. At seventy-five, I'm just about to be divorced (in this case, it's a good thing), and I fully expect to date and be with a new mate before long. I'm swamped with work -- editing book manuscripts for authors in the U.S. and other countries, and writing promotional and marketing material such as email blasts, websites, blog posts, and magazine profiles and feature stories.

Actually, I've been a writer/editor since my first job, as an advertising copywriter in Little, Brown Publishers' Trade Book Department in Boston in 1962. I never once thought of retirement, because I love working with words so much. And...now that I guess I'm at, or past, retirement age, I still can't even comprehend not working. I'll tell ya, I'm in demand!

My parents were prolific freelance radio and television scriptwriters in the 1940s through the 1970s, and I was their only child. I got all of their passion for, and delight in, working with words. When I was a kid in New York, they were writing murder mysteries for the radio such as *The Shadow* (two scripts), *Mr. and Mrs. North*, *Famous Jury Trials*, and *Grand Central Station*. My Dad worked as a staff writer at WLW, the big NBC station in Cincinnati, for over ten years,

mostly in the 1950s. An unknown writer named Rod Serling (later of Twilight Zone and Night Gallery TV fame) joined the staff at WLW. My Dad and Rod became good friends, and co-authored a murder mystery that aired on the Philip Morris TV Playhouse in 1954. It was the only time Serling had a co-author.

Health-wise, I've been lucky. No major problems. Last year I had a bcc (basal cell carcinoma), and, thanks to Mohs Microsurgery and a young woman surgeon with diplomas from Harvard and Johns Hopkins, I'm fine. But...I caught it early.

When I was forced to move in December 2013 (my husband of twelve years developed some intractable physical conditions such as undiagnosed bipolar disorder and ADHD, and my friends think he really did me a favor to initiate the divorce), I discovered a friendly, sweet town thirty minutes north of Marin, where I lived for fifteen years.

Two friends who live here in Petaluma encouraged me to look here for a place. Sure enough, there on Craigslist was a beautifully restored 1896 Victorian near the wonderful downtown area, with four other housemates. I was the only person the property manager/housemate interviewed for the room; she is New Age-y and was counting on "Spirit" to guide her to the right person. So, at seventy-five, I'm in a dorm situation! Two women live downstairs, and I'm up on the second floor with John and Jim, two very good-looking divorced guys in their fifties (each has three children) who are sweet, kind, good huggers and good listeners. How fortunate! I fully expect that, when my divorce is final at the end of July, I will start dating through various avenues -- whether Internet dating, which is how I met my first two husbands (my first husband, of twenty-four years, was a jewel of a guy who died of cancer in 1994), through activities I pursue, through friends, whatever. I have a huge intuition that I will meet whoever it is within the next three months or so, and that we will live together (perhaps marry, I don't know) by summer of 2015. I can't tolerate the thought of dating for years, and I can't tolerate the thought of living by myself. I am cut out to be with a partner/Significant Other/husband/whatever (companion sounds too much like a dog to me).

So...there you have it...I joined a health club and figure it will take me a year to get back in shape. I'm getting all aspects of my life fixed up to where I think they're fine. It will take a while. I'm making wonderful friends here in Petaluma. I'm searching for new clients in both editing and writing. I may not find the man of my dreams here; I may have to move again.

But...at seventy-five...a new life!

Linda Jay has words in her DNA! Her parents, Verne and Helen Jay, were prolific radio and television scriptwriters. At seventy-five, Linda edits about twenty-five book manuscripts a year, from business to novels, memoirs, and zombies, and writes marketing and promotional copy for websites, blogs, magazine articles. She sees no limits to her writing and editing future! Her website is <http://workpetaluma.com/people/linda-jay/>



Linda Jay (2014) [Photo by permission]

Love Never Dies

E. Ruth Harder

Age is a number, and I am not good with numbers. Am I really seventy-five? What am I doing with my life now? I'm widowed ten years. I'm busy with friends, book club, and church activities.

Six years ago I was visiting my daughter in Idaho. She was looking at property with a realtor and I tagged along. We drove up a mile-long gravel driveway aptly named Wild Plum. Atop the hill, eight miles from a small town and the Clearwater River appeared among Ponderosa pines the most lovely gingerbread house with a wrap-around front porch. It resided on five acres of timberland. When I looked out the stairwell window there appeared the most beautiful expanse of azure sky, green mountains, hills, and valleys I had ever seen. Tears filled my eyes. Wild roses, wild plum trees, daisies, vetch and balsam bloomed profusely.

Mind you, I had not planned it. My home in California was paid for. Friends, children and grandchildren lived nearby. This house is too big for me, I reasoned. Can I take care of it? How can I afford it?

My brain began working on justifying the place I had always wanted, a house on a hill. I remembered my age at which I needed to start using my IRA. Like a computer calculating everything, I felt certain this was where I should invest money. Innocently, I asked the realtor if the seller would accept less than the asking price. It turned out the house had been built on spec, completed two years prior. Via e-mail when I returned to California, I saw they'd accepted my offer. I felt excited and apprehensive. *I've never done this alone.*

My eldest grandson drove me to Idaho to sign papers and visit his mother. He and his girlfriend and I had a fun drive on Highway 95. The signs read, "Watch for cattle." We drove for miles without seeing anything but low brush and sand. "Moo!" Leah said. Boredom was broken. "Moo, moo," Sean answered. I chimed in, laughing.

Not to be left out, my next eldest grandson, Andrew, sixteen then, drove to Idaho with me. We "camped out" on blow-up mattresses in my house while I purchased furniture. Stove and dishwasher were already installed. A refrigerator ordered online was delivered the first day. It was delightful to decorate by myself.

I bought a four-wheel-drive used Honda Pilot which I leave in Idaho. It handled three teen-age grandsons and their gear. I have five grandsons. (The two eldest are married with busy lives.) Every summer since I bought this spacious house, I have invited grandsons. They've gone fishing, rafting, and kayaking on the Selway and Clearwater Rivers. One practices trap shooting. They've five acres on which to roam and watch quail, deer, snakes, lizards and all manner of creeping things. When not dry, I have a pond where they examined pollywogs.

I've hosted a "Sister Reunion" for my four sisters. We took a raft trip!

God is good. My hill home gives me a quiet place to meditate and write, to grow a few vegetables and lots of flowers. Two years ago I had a seven-foot fence erected just around my house to protect my plants from deer and free-range cattle. I still see them in the meadow below and all around. Breathtaking sunrises and sunsets abound, clear star-studded nights, dramatic lightning storms are all part of my life in my lovely abode.

I didn't sell my home in California, but retreat there every fall until the snow melts on my hill. I usually fly now.

My deceased husband, Chuck, knew I wanted to own a house on a hill. When we talked about that desire, he'd said, "If you want it, one day you'll have it." I get goose bumps telling the story. Love never dies.

This Old Tree

Oh, my, look at that old tree
I almost cut it down
Its gnarly limbs and faded leaf
Would surely make you frown

Oh, my, look at its new growth
A buzz with bees, bright green

Its branches reach up beautifully
To embrace a love unseen

Oh, my, I'll keep this old tree
Whose years have been productive
It's lived through storm and pestilence
And yet it's still seductive

Oh, my, see how the wind stirs
Limbs undulate with pleasure
That old bud is abloom again
A gift I'll always treasure.

E. Ruth Harder grew up on a farm in Uvalde County, Texas and has lived in Livermore, California since October 1965. She spent twenty-two years working at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory as a Technical Information Specialist (TIS). She holds a Masters in Library Science from San Jose State University. She's written numerous puppet scripts that are performed for children at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Livermore. California Writers Club, Tri-Valley Branch, critique group encourages her to write.



E. Ruth's house (2013)



E. Ruth, her 3 grandsons and a river guide ready to raft (2013)

[Photos by permission]