

“What We Can Learn From Old Animals” **(January 27, 2012)**

Aside from my work with older individuals, I have a passion for animals. Though I do not do any work directly with animals in need, I live vicariously through my sister, Justina Calgiano, who is the current Director of Public Relations at the Delaware County SPCA. The work that she and her colleagues do is heart-wrenching, while also being incredibly heart-warming. They care for the forgotten animals—at least the ones that they can fit into their small shelter. Justina recently forwarded to me the article, “What We Can Learn from Old Animals” by Anahad O’Connor, in the New York Times, which inspired my previous post, “Beauty in Aging.” You can read the article here:

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/29/what-we-can-learn-from-old-animals/?emc=eta1>

As an animal lover, photographer and geriatric social worker, this article brought all three passions together in a series of moving photos of aged animals, lost and forgotten. I like the perspective photographer Isa Leshko shares in the article regarding her series “Elderly Animals:”

Ms. Leshko was inspired to carry out her project after spending a year caring for her mother, who has Alzheimer’s disease and is now in a nursing home. She considered documenting the experience through pictures but soon decided against it. “A number of fine-art photographers have gone that route and produced really powerful work,” she said. “It just didn’t feel like the appropriate response for me. I didn’t think my mother could provide consent, and I wanted to be present as her daughter and caregiver.”

Instead of directly documenting the world in which she found herself as a caregiver for a mother with Alzheimer’s Disease, Ms. Leshko sought another outlet to explore her fears:

“On a personal level, I’ve been terrified of aging after dealing with my mother’s situation,” Ms. Leshko said. “My grandmother on my

mother's side also had dementia. I'm terrified of developing this disease. And I think that this project has been a way for me to immerse myself in that fear and try to better understand and make peace with aging."

As those who have provided care for loved ones with dementia know, it is a difficult job. I admire and respect Ms. Leshko's process of acceptance.

On a side note, I have often thought of creating a photo-essay documenting the state of aging in America. When a friend told me about Ed Kashi's book, "Aging in America, The Years Ahead" I figured he had done such a good job, I'd hold off for a few years! Another very respectable photographic journey: <http://talkingeyesmedia.org/aging-in-america>