

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH BEING OLD  
84-year-old Harriet Doerr uses her experiences in her  
novels  
by  
E. Louise Smith

"Don't call me a senior citizen," 84-year-old Harriet Doerr snapped at me. "I hate euphemisms. I'm old. There's nothing wrong with being old."

Such indignation was unexpected coming from this tiny, fragile-appearing, white-haired, legally blind lady who was led to the speaker's podium by her daughter.

Doerr was at Rio Hondo College to talk about her second book, "Consider This, Senora."

"Your age doesn't matter if you're at all interested in something. Old age gives you a very long point of view. It gives you a backward look which is wonderful for a writer. What happens to memory as the years go by, I think, is that it gets mixed up with imagination. Who's to say if what I write is actual fact or not? It doesn't matter. It's how I remember it.

"The wisdom of old age never comes. As soon as we think we have the answer, another unfathomable question comes up that we have to figure out."

In 1983, Doerr published her best-selling novel, "Stones of Ibarra," which was turned into a Hallmark Special for television starring Glenn Close. In 1984, it won the American Book Award for Fiction.

She was 73 years old when she started this whole new career.

In 1972, while they were living in Mexico, Doerr's husband died. In spite of her great love for Mexico and the Mexican people, clearly shown in her two novels, Doerr returned to the United States to earn the bachelor's degree she had abandoned for marriage.

"I was late the first day. The door was closed when I arrived at the classroom," Doerr said. "Very discouraging when you're 65 years old and know that everyone inside is 19 or 20.

"I stood there and thought to myself, 'You foolish old woman, what are you standing here for? Just go home.'

"I almost left and then I remembered something that baseball player, Bob Gibson, said. 'I don't believe in standing around the mound waiting for the catcher's signal to try and scare the batter. My philosophy is just hum it in there, baby, and let's see who's best, them or me.'"

"I just opened the door and went on in," Doerr said.

She graduated from Stanford University in 1978. Doerr went immediately into the graduate writer's program and wrote many short stories which finally became "Stones of Ibarra," a novel about her life with her husband in an isolated area of Mexico, where they were the only Anglos.

"If I hadn't received a lot of encouragement, I never would have written because I have no sense of security about my writing at all," Doerr said.

She was once asked by a young writer if she were happy during the 42 years she was doing nothing but being a wife, mother, gardener and charity worker.

"I couldn't believe the question, and I asked her to repeat it. Then I said I never heard of anyone being happy for 42 years. But it was exciting when I could change the occupation on my income tax forms from 'housewife' to 'writer.' I felt like pouring a bottle of champagne over the papers."

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## THE BOOK SHELF AT ELDERCOLLEGE

ElderCollege has a bookshelf for all of us to enjoy, where we can donate our unwanted books, CDs, magazines, videos, DVDs and jigsaw puzzles. Feel free to take home whatever appeals to you.

## COMING METAPHYSICS CLASSES

We invite you to join the Metaphysics Class meeting for a presentation by Vicki Linn on February 15, 2007, at Elder College, 1 p.m.-2:30 p.m. Vicki is a clinical hypnotherapist and is proficient in massage, Reiki and channeling. She works with Circle of Life Hospice and as a spiritual care counselor. Come hear how she uses her special gifts in the Reno community. Her subject will be something like "Living with paranormal gifts."

Madeline Nichols will be speaking March 29 to the Metaphysics class from 1 p.m.-2:30 p.m. Her subject will be something like "Healing with sound."