

From the Preface:

What Old People are Good for

Many years ago, I attended one of Professor Frederick Hulse's anthropology seminars at the University of Arizona. There, a student asked Dr. Hulse how we might know, from archeological evidence, that people were capable of speech. Dr. Hulse replied, "We can be sure of this, at least, when we find graves containing old people." His reasoning was that old people aren't much good for doing anything but talking. If they are found in graves, they must have been kept alive for many years because they had some value to their society. They were given the opportunity to get old because they had something to say that was deemed worth listening to.

Old ballplayers aren't much good for physical skills that have atrophied or sagged into flab, but we still might be good for talking or writing. Perhaps we even have an obligation to do so – to make it worthwhile for society to keep us around.

Why I Wrote this Book

I wrote *Snake Jazz* to demonstrate that motivation and hard work are much more important than genes and other kinds of luck in giving your autobiography a happy ending. Practice, practice, practice will not only get you to Carnegie Hall, it will get you to Yankee Stadium, the U.S. chess championships, or just about anywhere else you care to go.

In recent years I have learned from reading the works of researchers such as Carol Dweck * that often children are praised for the wrong traits. When kids are told, "You're very smart," or "You're a natural athlete," they assume these characteristics are inherited and, therefore, come without effort. They believe nothing they do will make them brighter or make them a greater athlete; therefore, if they start accumulating evidence that they aren't so smart or that they're klutzy, the uncovered "flaws" imply unfortunate genes. Nothing they can do will change that. They might as well give up. Dr. Dweck calls this a *fixed mindset*.

On the other hand, suppose a kid is told, "If you work hard, you will improve." And she or he is praised for effort made to improve. Fate is in the kid's own hands. Lose a game? Practice more. Fail a quiz? Study harder. Find new ways to succeed. Keep working at it because you can improve – this is a *growth mindset*.

If this book is successful, it will illustrate these ideas with examples from my career and the careers of players and managers I knew. It will tell you something you can use, and make it worthwhile for society to keep me around.

* Dweck, C.S. 2006. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Random House, NY, NY.