The living of the yoga life with its bountiful practices enables us to age gracefully. There have been a great many examples of such yogis in the past and even in modern times there are many who have been examples of this dictum. The recently departed Guru of the modern Ashtanga movement, Yogacharya Pattabhi Jois was 94 and fit as a fiddle to the last moment of his illustrious life. Yogacharya BKS Iyengar at 91 is a living testimony to this while in recent times the centenarian Swami Bua, Swami Shankaragiri, our own Guru, Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri, Swami Chidananda Saraswathi, Swami Kuvalayananda, Shri Yogendraji, Pundit Kannaiah Yogi, Swami Suddananda Bharathi and so many others have been role models of “aging gracefully”.

Swamiji has had many students who have become octogenarian yogis and are living the yoga life with amazing grace and zest remaining “young at heart”! In the past two years I have had the opportunity to meet two of them and interact with them with great reverence for the way they have lived and continue to live their life.

Yogacharini Janaki Devi (June Chadwick) is past her eightieth birthday but was part of my first intensive retreat in the UK that was held last year in Wales. She put to shame many of the younger participants with her ability and enthusiastic participation in each and every session of the three day retreat. Janaki has been a student of Swamiji’s for many decades and has visited the ashram on many occasions and has also introduced many students to the Gitananda tradition. She had been part of Swamiji’s retreat in the UK in the 1970’s and to have her in my first UK retreat was very special indeed.

My recent tour down under gave me an excellent opportunity to interact with Sri Balarathnam in Melbourne who has founded the Vibrational Breath Therapy, based on Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga. Sri Bala has been a dedicated student of Swamiji since the 1980’s and helped guide me to choose my destiny at a time when I needed the guidance. It was a great pleasure to meet him again after many years though we have been in constant touch through regular correspondence and exchanges of ideas over the net. I consider his Chakra mediation session held on my birthday at Melbourne to be amongst one of the best birthday gifts I have ever got till date! Sri Bala’s dedication and intense Yoga Sadhana at this age is an example to us all in how we can and should live. I was amazed at his enthusiasm to spread the message of Yoga and help everyone that comes into his life. Heat off to him for it!

I have grown up seeing many of Swamiji’s students who are now into their late sixties, seventies and eighties and one that I always remember with great love and affection is Nergis Dalal in Dheradun. Nergis is now entering her nineties and must hold the record for being Swamiji’s oldest living student. I still remember the summer Swamiji took us to North India and the time we all spent in Dheradun. She was one of Swamiji’s loved and loving ones and also had a great mutual admiration running between her and Amma. Once when Amma was visiting me at Wardha during my medical education, we were pleasantly surprised to read a column in the newspaper where she had written a glowing account of Amma’s amazing life. Nergis is a prolific writer and had a lesson on yoga in the Indian school text books for many years that took Swamiji’s message to so many thousands of students all over India. It was so wonderful recently to receive a lovely letter from her sharing her blessings and good wishes on my growth.

There are so many more out there in the world but I felt stimulated to write about these three seniors who have been such an important part of my life and continue to bless me in all my efforts to spread Swamiji’s message worldwide.