

reading. The last chapter in Brearley's section of the book, entitled 'Acceptable risk, assessment and resources', is again a mixture. It starts with an interesting distinction between 'acceptable risks' which are within normally recognised limits of reasonableness, and risks which are 'tolerated' because there is no alternative: 'it is not only a question of what we consider to be a reasonable level of risk but also of what we can afford to regard as unfair or intolerable'. These concepts could usefully have been developed further, but Brearley goes on to a discussion of social assessment and evaluation of emergencies which would have been more appropriate to the chapter on 'Risk and social work', swings back to sketch a theoretical account of research relating to older people's attitudes to risk-taking and then takes up again the theme of the relationship between resources and needs. The final sections of this chapter are a relatively straightforward description of resources in terms of innovatory services, flexible care packages, the support of the informal sector and the 'team' approach.

In short, this book is, in its various parts, a useful practical introduction to social work with elderly people and a mine of interesting but confusing theoretical concepts. It is, however, a great pity that its presentation reinforces the stereotypes which it sets out to destroy.

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Muriel Skeet, *The Third Age, a Guide for Elderly People, their Families and Friends*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 215 pp., £6.95, ISBN 0232 51484 4.

Before I read this book I had the advantage of attending a three-day pre-retirement course; this consisted of talks given by people from the Inland Revenue, banks, social services, Age Concern, and a G.P., followed by discussion groups. At the end of the course we were all given a very comprehensive file of pamphlets and books.

It is therefore not surprising that except in small matters of detail I found nothing that was new in the book; indeed, I think that the author has attempted to cram too much information into one book, and maybe if it had been published as a trilogy, and dealt with its contents under headings such as social, medical and legal, it would have been more readable. In my view it would also be more useful and accessible.

Moving on to the contents of the book, the author provides an enormous amount of information, this ranges from preparation for retirement to caring for the very ill and dying. In between those extremes she deals with such matters as pension rights, investment, and tax problems; she also discusses moving house, welfare rights, sheltered accommodation, and quite a lot of other subjects, about which the layman probably has little or no knowledge. On the whole, I found it a difficult book to read, and found her practice of constantly referring to this or that authority rather annoying. I realise that this is standard practice in academic texts, but I am not an academic and Muriel Skeet claims to be writing for a lay readership.

Finally, may I reiterate my plea for the separation of the subject matter,

then perhaps the more squeamish of us may be spared the details of colostomies, incontinence and terminal cancers until we really need to know about these things.

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Meg Montague, *Ageing and Autonomy*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy (Australia), 1982, 198 pp., no price, ISBN 909571 92 9.

This short book is the report of a research project carried out in and by the St Laurence Brotherhood, an Australian religious foundation providing care and accommodation for the elderly in Melbourne. I believe that no organisation in this country provides the same range of accommodation, from Hostels (the Australian equivalent of our Homes and perhaps a more honest name) through flats with varying degrees of supervision to cottages on a managed rural retirement settlement.

The research, carried out by the Brotherhood's own research department, looked at applicants for all three types of accommodation at the point of their application, again two weeks after admission and finally four months after they had taken up residence. It focused on whether, in applying, they sought dependence or independence, on the extent to which they wished to retain or relinquish control over their lives and their participation in everyday affairs, and the degree to which what they were provided with met their needs. Rather than assume meanings for dependence/independence the researchers initially discussed these concepts with elderly residents and allowed meanings to evolve from these conversations.

Because of funding limitations and the need to have findings quickly available to aid policy making the project was a small-scale one, with 40 subjects overall at the outset. The usual type of attitude scale proved very difficult to use with older subjects, so a looser interview format was adopted and the findings were treated qualitatively. This presentation results in a much more graphic picture being presented than might have been gained from an attempt to quantify such small-scale data.

The results are succinctly presented but a summary cannot do justice to their subtlety. In general, hostel applicants wanted a degree of dependence but were offered too much and quickly became socialised to it; people seeking flats wanted independence in their daily living combined with relief from the practical problems of maintaining their own houses; and those going into the settlement wanted autonomy plus physical and long-term security. But this is to leave out of account the bearing on attitudes and expectations of admissions policy, past life experiences, immediate events and family pressures, etc., that all come out in the report.

This is a modest piece of work in the primary sense of the term. It pursues a limited aim imaginatively, it makes specific research-grounded recommendations which it does not seek to generalise, and it sets out clearly issues and