

OLD AND ON THEIR OWN

Robert Coles, photographs by Alex Harris and Thomas Roma. Norton/Double-Take, \$27.50 (192p) ISBN 0-393-04606-0

Harvard psychiatrist Coles, author of the acclaimed *Children of Crisis* series, here inquires of 11 men and women, all of them over 75 and living on their own, "How are you getting on?" Although several of the people are upbeat and only a few are grumpy, the atmosphere of the book is one of depression, and that mood has robbed Coles of the kind of optimism that marked his studies of children. "It's living with trouble, lots of trouble, that's what old age is all about," one woman tells him. One man, who suffers from high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, observes: "You never do know if you'll see another day, so you never do relax and just live, the way other folks do," a sentiment shared by another man: "The doctors say I'm depressed, but I tell them no, I'm realistic." The women, by and large, are less melancholic, more positive and cheerful, as witness one 83-year-old who briefly became an alcoholic following the death of her husband and now deals with her "metaphysical anxiety" with ballroom dancing. As they re-

count the routine discomforts of an aging body—"trouble passing water, bones creaking"—they are very aware that "it's all winding down." Clearly, aging is difficult to accept, and not much easier to read about, though some may find comfort in knowing that they are not alone. Photos. (*Apr.*)