

The Golden Years – Ha!

And just what years are those?

For many years it was considered the period of time after retirement, usually in the age range of 62-65. Work hard, get your gold watch, travel, and generally relax. However, the retirement age and even the term senior citizen is changing depending on the situation – moving higher in some cases like eligibility for full social security benefits and lower in others like membership eligibility for AARP. With increasing longevity and with many living to be 100, the definition of middle age and retirement age and/or senior citizen will no doubt continue to shift and change. However, if you can relate to the following definition you are probably in the age range where you are thinking about retirement or may have already retired from one job and started looking for another one.

“Old age is when former classmates are so gray and wrinkled and bald, they don’t recognize you.”

The aging process – both the length of time and the quality of that time- is affected by many different factors: Place of birth (general environment and family and health resources), culture you live in, (U.S., India, Middle East, China) marital status, diet, education (generally more resources/easier life style), heredity, physical and mental health. Let’s think about some of these differences as we brainstorm a list of the challenges of aging, some of the joys of growing older, qualities you admire in older people, and some examples of people who have made positive changes in their lives.

Biggest Challenges of Growing Older:

“Don’t let aging get you down; It’s too hard to get back up.”

Greatest Joys/Advantages:

“Some people try to turn back their odometers. Not me, I want people to know why I look this way. I’ve traveled a long way and some of the roads weren’t paved.”

Qualities you most admire in an older person/persons:

Many of the qualities we’ve listed fit the researched characteristics of healthy people approaching 100 years of age:

- **Physical:** Thin, daily exercisers, consume low calorie high fruit and vegetable diets, non-smokers, moderate alcohol intake, sleeps well, infrequently ill, use preventive health services, and have a positive outlook about their health.

- **Intellectual:** Kept minds active before and after retirement which occurred in their 70's, learned something new each day, have a passion for reading and discussing current events, often reflecting on the good things in life.
- **Emotional:** Optimistic, pleased with their lives, anger is short-lived, rarely hostile to others, cope well with stress, have a good sense of humor, and many outlets for relaxation and recreation.
- **Relational:** Frequently helping others, have successful marriages or have always been single, have many friends younger than themselves, feel support from a large social network, and often attend social functions.
- **Spiritual:** Have multiple spiritual commitments that provide a sense of purpose and meaning to their lives, appreciate the beauty of nature, pray and/or meditate daily.

It is never too late to set in motion positive changes in our lives. We are **not** guaranteed a certain amount of time on Earth, but we can surely enhance the quality of the time we are here. It only makes sense:

- to enjoy the company of other people,
- to learn something new every day,
- to tell funny stories and enjoy a good laugh.
- to cultivate a personal passion after retirement and
- to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

However, change is not easy – takes a great deal of patience, persistence, a positive attitude, and a plan. **“The Little Engine That Could”** had all those qualities. Any one remember the key points to the story? But even with all those qualities we experience setbacks and disappointments but those who get back on track:

- Talk positively to themselves about the good things that have been accomplished and/or experienced;
- Seek help from family, friends, professionals, support groups such as Extension Homemaker club members and
- Redesign/adjust their plan/s.

Share some ideas of how you and/or someone you know made some positive changes in their life such as diet, exercise, handling loss and disappointments, etc. So we don't take ourselves too seriously and maintain a sense of humor I'll start this brainstorming session with a story that shows efforts to make positive changes but the effort that goes into it and a sense of humor you need as well.

“I felt like my body had gotten totally out of shape, so I got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and start exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for an hour. But, by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over.”

This person took several positive steps in making changes in her life – went to the Dr. for a check-up – found an aerobics class for seniors – will be healthier and perhaps make some new friends as well. Other examples of positive changes made by people?

Aging

**Growing old is but a state of mind.
You can enjoy your age or feel sorry
for yourself and sit around and pine.
You can make your self feel happy or
blue, whichever you choose is up to you.
Remember you can be old in age but
young at heart. You've gained wisdom
which can play a big part in whatever
new adventure you may want to start.
So quit trying to elude the age you are
Accept it and reach for the stars
Follow your dreams although they may
seem afar. You've traveled life's road
long enough to know the score and you
can handle anything life could have in store
Keep up the faith. It will open many doors
Believe in yourself and don't worry about
your age. For growing older is just about another phase.**

Bonnie Ruth Shaulis

References:

“Aging Gracefully,” prepared by Sam Quick, Ph.D, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Kentucky.

“Take Control of Your Aging” by William B. Malarkey, M.D., The Wooster Book Company, Wooster, Ohio 1999.

The Ohio State University Extension Service Senior Series, <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~seniors/>

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, January 2006.

“Getting Motivated,” AARP, January 2006.