

The Adventure of Aging

By Sebastian de Assis

Old age, like success, is a journey not a destination. It requires a positive attitude, healthy habits, and a modicum of planning. Indeed, aging can and should be a successful expedition offering unlimited potential for individual development.

From the womb of the mother to the entrails of Mother Earth, the chronological universal human experience follows the same pattern: infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, old age, and the expiration of time (for a poetic description of this itinerary of life, refer to William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, Act II Scene VII.) And even though our culture regards the latter stage of life as undesirable—perhaps because of the collective fear of our inevitable demise—the purported Golden Age can be our momentous time to shine before the curtains fall in the great play of life in which all the world is a stage. Besides, since this demographic group is not only expanding at exponential rates, but it also has improved significantly with the advent of the Baby Boomer generation, the possibilities for a triumphant closing act are very promising.

In a 2010 study on Baby Boomers conducted by the Pew Research Center, it was determined that 76 million people were born in the United States during the Baby Boomer generation period between January 1, 1946 and December 31, 1964. After subtracting those who have died and adding immigrants born during those years, the Census estimates there are roughly 79.6 million people ages 45 to 64 in the United States. Once a simple mathematical equation is in place, the reality of this demographic transformation reveals itself: dividing 79.6 million by 19 years, then dividing the result by 365 days, the final calculation leads to 11,478, which is the approximate number of people who will turn 65 each day for the next 19 years. These figures indicate that our society is steadily moving toward a gerontocracy; a time of senior dominance.

There are not only more senior citizens but they are living longer. According to the National Center for Health Statistics Bureau, the likelihood that an American who reaches the age of 65 will survive to the age of 90 has nearly doubled over the past 40 years. As of 2000 there were 65,000 Americans over the age of 100. There are estimates that predict more than a million by 2050.

However, these staggering numbers only tell one part of the story. The Baby Boomers, who are ushering our country into an elder-dominated society, are the best educated, most socially conscientious, and the most politically savvy older generation that ever lived in the United States. The dissenting idealism of their younger years in the 1960's was a phenomenal manifestation against the socio-economic injustices of their time, many of which continue unabated today. Thus, their work is not quite done yet. In the latter stage of their lives, they're creating a new paradigm for aging as a political and cultural force while embracing a greater role in society's affairs as the longevity revolution advances.

As the great American elder rights activist, Maggie Kuhn, once stated, "old age is not a disease; it is a strength and survivorship and triumph over all kinds of vicissitudes and disappointments, trials and illnesses." In the face of so many challenges and losses, we become stronger—alas not always wiser—as we get older. It's a voyage in time akin to climbing a mountain: the closer we get to the peak, more exhausted and breathless we become, but on the other hand we can appreciate a much better panoramic view.

Aging is an adventure laden with extraordinary opportunities. Don't miss yours.



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