

CARING FOR OTHERS

Growing Old: The Best is Yet To Be



The best is yet to be? Does life get better with age? Growing older is not a choice that we have in life, but growing old is. Everyone has different thoughts on growing older. Some people are afraid to get older because of the many disadvantages while others anticipate it because of the many advantages. Those benefits may include:

- Greater wisdom and experience
- Greater awareness of priorities and what is truly important in life

- Greater self confidence
- More time to do things you want to do
- Increased appreciation for physical self
- Grandchildren

One's older years can be one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling times of life. There are more seniors today than ever before. In the early 1900's, 3.1 million Americans were age 65 and older. Researchers estimate that by 2030, 20 percent of the U.S. population will be senior citizens. Some of the current trends we are seeing today includes:

- Longer life expectancy. People are living longer than in the past. The number of people living until 100 years is

consistently increasing. Better economic position. The number of seniors below the poverty level has decreased from 35 percent in the early 1960's to approximately 10 percent today.

- Higher education. More seniors have high school diplomas and increasingly have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Lasting marriages. The majority of seniors younger than 85 years are married. Women tend to live longer than men and, older men are twice as likely to be married as elderly women.

Given these changing trends, our focus should be on the benefits of growing older as we age. Wendy Lustbader's book, "Life Gets Better", provides an optimistic viewpoint about the value of aging. The book contains

short essays categorized into three sections labeled, Hope, Transformation, and Peace. The essays draw on her experience as a social worker working with elders. Aging can be difficult, but Lustbader reframes the negative aspects to help the reader view aging in a more positive way. This is a "must read" book about the positive value of aging.

The later years of life can be filled with purpose, dignity and joy, or they can be riddled with frustration, depression and pain. Much depends upon us, our attitudes, values, family and support systems. Growing older is going to happen whether we prepare for it or not and, growing old is a privilege denied to many. **The best is yet to be** if we focus on the positive, unexpected pleasures of growing older.



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