

AGING GRACEFULLY IN THE 21st CENTURY

By: Jan Phillips

“Aging Gracefully” brings to mind a picture of a sophisticated older woman wearing an elegant evening dress, leaning on the rail of a cruise ship. A mysterious little smile on her face, as she placidly gazes out at the ocean, her hair gracefully flowing in the breeze. Or perhaps, an older couple sitting in their camp chairs beside their motor home - looking over the lake as they roast marshmallows over an open fire. In the distance, the sun is setting and geese are landing on the lake.

Sound like what most of us would like for our “twilight” years? Let me tell you “Aging Gracefully” usually turn out a little different! The minute you turn 50, you get bombarded through the mail with offers for “Senior Citizens”. Why 50 is the turning point for being old is a mystery -why not 49? Or 51? AARP has agents combing each neighborhood for any geezers who are teetering on 49 and they efficiently report to their headquarters when another one has reached the turning point! Then AARP notifies all their contacts, which range from hearing aid companies to vitamins. Before you know it, your mail box and email are stuffed with offers from every geriatric firm you have ever heard of.

Most of us over 50 are trying our best to “Age Gracefully” but it can be discouraging when the television advertisements remind us that we “old” people must now be prepared to deal with life’s aches, pains and body dysfunctions. They also tell you every embarrassing detail about everything from constipation to Viagra. Try explaining “Viagra” to your grandson who is watching the show with you!

The other day, my newspaper reported that an “elderly” woman, in my city, had had her house robbed. The article went on to say that she lived alone and was 65 years old. Since when is 65 elderly? How old was the reporter that wrote the article - 19? As you can tell, my feeble old brain actually processed the article and was a little upset! When I was a teenager, I just KNEW that I would die before I was 30; because that was so old that there couldn’t possibly be any life after that! Maybe, that’s what that reporter thought. Obviously, I’ve changed my mind over the years!

It seems that there should be a compromise between sitting around all day complaining about every ailment you can possibly imagine (even if you have to make them up to get a little sympathy), and hopping on your Harley- with your pink hair streaming behind you, and riding off into the sunset!

I guess all of us, as we grow older, have to find our niche all over again. All of the “living gracefully” people that I have met, have not let their age become a deterrent to their interest or their passions. It’s time to try out new and different things that life did not permit when we were younger. We old “geezers” are everywhere. We might be the volunteer at the hospital that brings you your mail and offers you a magazine, or the ones tutoring the children with reading problems. You might meet them at the food bank boxing up food or helping at the Special Olympics. We hang out in strange places like: Walking dogs at the animal shelter - fixing meals at the Ronald McDonald house or handing out lunches to the homeless.

Yep! - We are everywhere and the young don’t even see us! They think that we are all confined to places where we will quietly fade away, and they never suspect that the time will come when they will have to figure out how to “Age Gracefully!”