

## **Aging Gracefully in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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*Honorable Mention*

I have to give credit to author Haruki Murakami who, writing about his long distance running experiences said: "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional." I retired at the age of 65 in 1997 and began marathon running at that time. His observation about running is most astute. Distance running is equally if not more, in being mentally tough as well as physically prepared. The quality of your mental conditioning is what carries you through the rigor of the 26 miles. Training and preparation is the means of achieving success, but mental toughness is the significant ingredient to successfully crossing the finish line. Age is not the limiting factor, only ones' physical capacity.

Graceful aging is not dissimilar. One could say, "Aging is inevitable, negative attitude is optional." Aches and pains seem to become our present companion, with health issues and doctor visits, a common happenstance. Some of us are more challenged than others and face obstacles that truly test ones strength and resolve. Under such circumstances, our focus can be quickly diverted inward and become self-consuming. Add the economic downturn we face, and our uncertainty only increases. Yet, many cope under such stress and approach their finish line with vigor and vitality, with grace and compassion.

We have all witnessed those who amaze us with their energy for living and their reaching out to their neighbors in their time of need. They remain active in social activities and love life, regardless of the limitations they might face. Those are they, who are aging gracefully. How do they do it?

Overcoming that which tears us down is often what's in our thoughts when we face each day anew. A positive, interested, involved approach to what surrounds us goes a long way in enabling us to look beyond ourselves and embrace the joy of the day. Such an outreach does not heal our health issues, but it does have an impact on our attitude and goes a long way in how we cope with our health.

A positive attitude is not an easy path to travel, nor does it eliminate our ups and downs. We all have good days and bad, we all encounter remorse and despair, all of which makes how we face such issues, key to aging gracefully. We cannot always succeed in warding off the depression bug, or passing by the hurts of our aging bodies, nor the endless line of doctor visits we might require. What we can do is not lose our focus of life's beauty, of life's blessings and of life's rewards, no matter how obscure they might be. Aging is not a penalty but another stage of living. We are never too old to look around, to look ahead and look to befriend those who need an uplifting hand.

To this end, we "age with grace."