

## Attitude: The Key to Aging

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*Honorable Mention*

“Aging gracefully” might seem like an oxymoron. As Anthony Powell expressed it, “Growing old is like being increasingly penalized for a crime you haven’t committed.”

Whoa! Let’s not be negative here! I have known several seniors who have taken aging in stride. One couple I know has been through some tough times together. Given an ultimatum that he had but weeks to live, the husband underwent stomach bypass surgery, lost not just the weight but his diabetes as well and he is now caring for his wife who battles cancer. They quietly go about their lives taking care of one another and smiling all the while. I try to follow their good example in light of my own troubles. As one who suffers from five chronic diseases or conditions—diabetes, sarcoidosis, sleep apnea, congestive heart failure and dangerously high calcium levels—I have spent this year in and out of the hospital so much I’m on a first name basis with most of the nurses! I try to take the ups and downs of life with equanimity. Instead of asking “Why me?” I think, “Why not me?”

That doesn’t mean I’m always cheerful and pleasant to be around. When my calcium levels shot into the stratosphere, my husband says I’m a real bear. I just shrug it off and go get treated. After all, aren’t seniors allowed a modicum of grouchiness? We’ve earned it after all these years of raising our children, pinching pennies and dealing with the hills and valleys of life.

When I was a child growing up in a small New Hampshire town, we had neighbors who epitomized the “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” phenomenon together. They were sisters, supposedly cut from the same cloth, but different as night and day. I always approached the house with a certain amount of dread. Which sister would open the door? Miss Morgan was a rotund, short woman with white hair tied in a knot on the top of her head. Her rosy cheeks and smooth, almost unwrinkled face belied her age. I visibly relaxed as she asked, “What can I do for you dear?” If however, her sister Mrs. Prescott, answered my knock, I stood quailing on the doorstep as she thundered, “Kids! What do you want?” She was a tall, stout, imposing figure with her share of grouchiness and intolerance thrown in. Abraham Lincoln remarked, “People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be.” Apparently, old Mrs. Prescott hadn’t read much about the illustrious president of the 1860’s.

I don’t think the attitude towards aging has changed much over the years except for some (and rightly so!) criticism the younger generation feels towards the debts our country has left them. On the other hand, medical advances have helped us live longer lives. To live a full, happy life is a matter left up to the individual. Perhaps Billie Burke got it right by saying, “Age is something that doesn’t matter, unless you are a cheese.”