

Notes of talk given to The University of the third Age (U3A)

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27 January 2015

Living Longer, Ageing Well



“Health is your greatest gift, contentment your greatest treasure, confidence your greatest friend ”

Lao Tsu 6th century BC

Epicurus in Greek philosopher: Epicurus 2300 years ago ... focus was on how to be happy. What he said was profound. He said that if can face the future with confidence then we are more likely to be happy.

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And with increased life expectancy in the developed world the paradigm has changed: Not how long will we live but how can we be happy in the process.

But burglars of joy threaten to undermine that confidence. (Health, Finance. Relationships, Security?)

Anxiety tends to increase as we get older.

Quotients: IQ, EQ, **AQ (adversity quotient),**

To age well we need to be resilient. What is my AQ? AQ evaluates how well we cope. A low AQ indicates a tendency to stall or give up in the face of adversity.-Low AQ linked to depression.

RQ: resilience quotient. Considered to be the most important... the ability to bounce back and recover from life’s problems.

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Psychoneuroimmunology – (PNI) There is a direct link with how we mentally deal with stress and our physical health and wellness. Our thoughts, feelings, and emotions, all of which can powerfully impact our immune system and affect our resistance to illness and our ability to heal.

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80 the new 60?

How would you best describe yourself out of these four possibilities:

Do you consider yourself:

1. Middle-aged
2. Late middle aged,
3. Old?
4. None of the above?

There is consensus that no matter what age you are between 50 and 80 the correct **answer is four - none of the above!**

Why is that? This is because terms such as ‘middle-aged’ and ‘old’ have lost their meaning owing to the dramatic changes that have taken place in our brains and bodies over the last generation. *There used to be the perception that at age 65 the individual no longer mattered and was no longer relevant.* That’s a major change from my parents’ generation, when “old” was regarded to be about 60.

UBS Wealth Management Americas discovered that most wealthy investors today do not feel “old” until they turn 80.

We are now living 30 years longer than we were at the beginning of the 20th century. By 2050 more than 20% of humanity will be 60 or older. The fastest growing segment of the world’s population is the very old with some estimates of centenarians projected to reach nearly 6 million by 2050. In fact, one-third of babies born in the UK in 2013 are expected to live to 100, according to their Office for National Statistics.

Heredity is simply not as powerful influence on aging as is generally assumed. This conclusion was teased out of a major study of both identical and non-identical twins in Sweden. Moreover, it's shown that, as we age, genetic inheritance becomes less of a factor and environment (e.g. Delhi) and lifestyle become more important.

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John Kennedy...Mae West

John Kennedy observed in a 1963 address to congress, "It is not enough for a great nation merely to have added years to life. Our objective must be to add life to those years." Do you remember actress Mae West's famous words from years past, "It's not the men in my life that counts--it's the life in my men."

Japan.

With its low birthrate and long life expectancy, Japan is rapidly greying and already has one of the world's highest proportions of elderly people the number of people aged 65 accounting for 25.1 percent of the population,

In Japan sales of adult diapers are set to overtake sales of baby nappies by next year, according to Euromonitor, a blunt reflection of how rapidly the world's third-largest economy is ageing.

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Amortality

Why acting your age is a thing of the past

Today people are not conforming to the outdated expectations of age. The amortal's form of positive thinking - refusing to contemplate age and death - can bring positive results up to a point. Life spans have lengthened but health spans have not kept pace

And now 'amortality' is in vogue, a term coined by Catherine Mayer for the burgeoning trend of living agelessly. (Amortality: The Pleasures and Perils of Living Agelessly) Hollywood is a source of examples of amortality with Madonna adopting children at 49 and 50 and Hugh Hefner marrying a woman 60 years younger. Amortals rarely ask themselves if their behaviour is age

appropriate because that concept has little meaning for them. Clint Eastwood's (born 1930) going strong at 85! 'American Sniper' Earns Massive \$90.2M Weekend. As ageless as Mick Jagger (72) or Meryl Streep (65)

On **the down** side is another phenomenon of our times: increased longevity without extended vitality, the living death before death, sometimes lasting decades.

Perhaps 'amortality' can be best summed up by a bumper sticker which says: "I refuse to get old". What they may have been forgetting is that "Life is a sexually transmitted disease with a 100% mortality rate."

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What happens as we age?

In 1961 a microbiologist Leonard Hayflick made a depressing discovery. He found that most human cells are able to divide only a limited number of times, so that even if we get through life without contracting a single disease we'll die when enough of our cells cease dividing. Although our life expectancy continues to increase, by two to five years per decade in the developed world, the Hayflick limit would appear to doom us to a maximum of around 120 years. A striking example is France's Jeanne Calment. She held the world longevity record of 122 years old before dying in 1997. Famously vibrant, she bicycled until she was 100, and at 121 released a CD of reminiscences set to rap and other music!

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What has changed ten years on...?

Ten years on are we any closer to finding the Fountain of Youth?

Tales of such a fountain have been recounted across the world for thousands of years, appearing in writings by Herodotus (5th century BCE) and the stories of Prester John (early Crusades, 11th/12th centuries CE). In the 16th century Ponce de León was searching for the Fountain of Youth when he travelled to what is now Florida in 1513 in search of the fabled fountain of youth, which restored vigour and sexual energy to those who drank its water

So it's not hard to understand why there are still hopes and rumours that something soon to be discovered—magic waters, say, or maybe stem cell research—will do away with old age. People are still touting ‘miracle’ cures and ‘miracle’ waters.

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Red wine and resveratrol: Good for your heart

Red wine, in moderation, has long been thought of as heart healthy. The alcohol and certain substances in red wine called antioxidants may help prevent heart disease by increasing levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol) and protecting against artery damage.

However, those findings were reported only in mice, not in people. In addition, to get the same dose of resveratrol used in the mice studies, a person would have to drink more than impossible quantities of (1,000 litres) of red wine every day!

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Let's look at the three ages of man and women...

- 1. Chronological age:** (Our age according to our birth certificate.)
- 2. Psychological age** (Your “think age”. How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were? **Age disappears in direct proportion to the vitality of your ideas."**
- 3. Real or biological age.** If you follow a healthy diet, don't smoke, exercise and handle stress well your chronological age may be 54 but your Real age (biological age) could be 48. Conversely if your chronological age is 47 and you are overweight, smoke, don't exercise and don't handle stress well your real age could be 56.

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Dementia: The elephant in the room

Britain unprepared for 'tsunami' of dementia patients.

More than 800,000 people in the UK live with the condition, and the number is expected to rise to more than a million in less than 10 years' time. Britons now fear dementia more than cancer or death, according to a national poll.

It is important to distinguish between Alzheimer's and forgetfulness. George T. Grossberg, Professor of Geriatric Psychiatry at St. Louis University School of Medicine says, "Someone who misplaces their keys and gets frustrated and runs around looking for them may be absentminded. On the other hand, the individual who misplaces their keys doesn't know they are lost and then forgets what they are for; that's a much different level of impairment."

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Normal forgetting

- **Transience.** In this sense, transience is akin to cleaning the junk out of your closets or clearing the temporary files from your computer's hard drive.
- **Absentmindedness.** The need to concentrate more on what we are doing.
- **Blocking.** A common example is if you call your older daughter by your younger daughter's name, or vice versa. The 'tip of the tongue' phenomenon.

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Alzheimer's Disease: "Type 3 diabetes"

Research indicates that the brain is a target organ for damage by high blood sugar and Type 3 diabetes is the title being proposed for Alzheimer's disease which results from resistance to insulin in the brain. It appears that insulin not only keeps the blood vessels that supply the brain healthy, it also encourages the brain's neurons to absorb glucose, and allows those neurons to change and become stronger. Another incentive to eat healthily and to avoid junk food.

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Living longer ageing well: Things to help us cope:

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Joy is described as the ability to cope. How do you cope?

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Below the water line ...

The story of how Michael Plant in 1992, a well know American Yachtsman, commenced a solo crossing of the North Atlantic Ocean, from the United States to France. He started out in a brand new midsize sailboat with state of the art equipment and electronics. No one was worried about Michael. He was an experienced and capable seaman. But about two weeks into the voyage he disappeared during a storm. He could not be found by radar or by search and rescue. His sailboat was eventually found floating in the ocean upside down 400 miles off course. The keel had broken off.

What is not seen, what is below the waterline is what is important; in the case of the yacht, the amazingly heavy keel which stabilizes the boat. When the storms come and the winds blow the sails fill and the yacht remains stable and moves forward. ***What keeps (has kept) your life/my life stable when the winds blow/ when the winds have blown?***

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For me a clue I think, from comes from Charles Handy, a visiting professor at the London Business School and a British business guru.

To be resilient we need the 3 Ps

Person, purpose and pattern

For our inner journey

We will probably need three things to be able to cope and if we are not to be a victim of our circumstances.

Sense of person - We need to see ourselves as someone with an identity, with a sense of worth, someone who makes a difference in some way to some people. But we need encouragement. No affirmation can eventually mean no sense of person.

Sense of purpose - 'Traction' is an important component of psychological well-being. It is the traction of life. When we commit ourselves to a cause we believe in, there is a great sense of traction present. To learn/educate ourselves; to care for others. To be purposeless is to be a potential victim. The importance of a sense of purpose and meaning in our life. We need a sense of purpose. Okinawa known as the longevity island, has more **people over 100** years of age than anywhere else in the world. There is no word for retirement in their culture. Instead they have another word, "ikigai", which translates roughly to "purpose" or "that which makes one's life worth living."

Sense of pattern - When change is part of a predictable pattern it is more tolerable as it is more under our control. Our life normally has a sense of pattern: Relationships form the base from which we explore life; our family, friends, neighbours, people at work.

But....

- take away our identity or sense of person;
- make our purposes in life seem futile or unobtainable;
- disrupt our relationships and predictable patterns or rhythms of life and we collapse.

This was the method of the concentration camps destroying the person.

What about our own life? When the 3 Ps are put under pressure; when we suffer loss, are retrenched, retire, or a relationship that breaks down- the 3 Ps in our life take a hammering and may even collapse.

How to maintain the 3 Ps:

We need to ensure that we have a maintenance programme in place to ensure that our 3Ps are in good shape.

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Living Longer Ageing well: Things to help us cope:

How fit are you? Physically, socially, mentally and spiritually?

“Soldiers in the bottom 15% of emotional fitness and physical fitness are particularly vulnerable to PTSD.

Need to be emotionally fit as possible as we grow older.

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Eight things we can do to age well (including keeping mentally sharp)

- 1. Stay relaxed** and as unstressed as possible and remember more. (Fear blocks. “Fight or flight”. The brain freezes via the amygdala)
- 2. Recognize the importance of exercise** which causes the release of neurotrophins’ [substances which encourage sprouting between brain cells]. Also serotonin, endorphins. “Exercise the wonder drug for the over 50’s”.
- 3. Maintain an active social life. Need Vitamin F = friends! Relationships. Loneliness and our health.**

Mother Teresa described loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted as the most terrible poverty of all. “The greatest disease in the West today is not TB AIDS or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair and hopelessness is love.”

To be emotionally well, we need relationships, we need friends; (Vitamin F) we need a sense of community. For many, feeling lonely in old age is the biggest problem. While on a study visit to the University of Arizona and during a hospital ward round, I clearly remember the medical chart of a frail, elderly lady. On it was written, “No medicine to be given.” Instead the instructions were, “To be hugged three times a day.”

Impact on health

Chronic loneliness has been identified as a health hazard right up there with health risk factors such as smoking, obesity or lack of exercise.

When people are socially isolated health risks increase with the possibility of elevated blood pressure, diminished immunity, the progression of Alzheimer’s disease and sleep problems occurring plus an increased risk of clinical depression.

Solitude versus loneliness

Loneliness is not to be equated with solitude. You can be alone without being lonely or you can feel lonely in a crowd. Loneliness is when you are alone, not by choice. Solitude is a glorious time when you are alone by choice, a chance to organize your thoughts, to clear your thinking.

To be happier there is no need to go out and buy a self-help book. Just get yourself a few more happier friends.

4. The importance of being quiet ... to meditate to keep those pre-frontal cortex cells growing.

5. Pay attention: are we hurrying through life without stopping to really look listen and feel? (Mindfulness). At our age we can't count on the future, can't remember the past so it is important to be in the present!

6. Keep learning: curiosity and passion. **(CQ+PQ >IQ). Age disappears in direct proportion to the vitality of your ideas."** Sculpting the mind"

Neuronal plasticity: One of the most fascinating advances of modern neuro science is the realization that the brain circuitry is not hard wired but is significantly modifiable by experience.

"The brain is not hard wired in childhood and we are not doomed by our DNA. The brain is pliable, plastic and changeable throughout our lifespan irrespective of genetics." As we learn new skills, we really are physically "sculpting" the mind. .

7. Accomplishment (Accomplishment = a sense of mastery.) (DIY Ian. Story of fixing the leaking cistern.)

8. Laughter and humour. Benefits of laughter.

Smile therapy: using a pencil

Can you remember being told, without understanding why, to 'grin and bear it' or 'smile through a bad moment and it might just help you feel better'? And now research indicates that this was good advice.

We all experience 'down' days. Feeling down occasionally and experiencing a low mood is a normal part of life. The more miserable we feel, the more twisted our thinking becomes and it is important to restore perspective. There are trusted ways to help improve our mood such as exercise, to connect with others, to do a small kindness for someone else or to make sure we are getting enough sleep. *

An unusual and helpful way to help lift the mood if you are not feeling good, is to get a pencil and hold it between your teeth but not touching

your lips. This causes a muscle that controls facial expressions, the zygomaticus (zy-go-mat-i-cus) muscle, to contract retracting the lip and mouth creating a smile.

Genuine smiles, known as Duchenne smiles named after French neurologist Guillaume Duchenne, are the type of smile that creates this positive effect and is uniquely associated with positive emotion. These smiles engage the muscles in the mouth, cheeks, and eyes and are considered to be genuine smiles.

So if you see anyone walking around with a pencil gripped in their teeth, don't worry, they may have read this article and are working on lifting their mood for the day.

“People smile when they are happy but also feel happier because they are smiling”

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Feeling down versus being depressed.

Important: If 'feeling down' persists for two weeks or more, you, or the person you are concerned about, may be clinically depressed and it is important that a doctor be consulted.

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Stewart and his wife Barbara go to the county fair every year.



And every year Stewart would say, "**Barbara, I'd like to ride in that helicopter**"

Barbara always replied,

"I know Stewart, but that helicopter ride is seventy quid, and seventy quid is seventy quid!"

One year later Stewart and Barbara went to the fair, and Stewart said, "Barbara, I'm 75 years old. If I don't ride that helicopter, I might never get another chance"

To this, Barbara replied,

"Stewart, that helicopter ride is seventy quid, and seventy quid is seventy quid"

The pilot overheard the couple and said, "Folks I'll make you a deal. I'll take the both of you for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and don't say a word I won't charge you a penny! But if you say one word **its seventy quid.** "

Stewart and Barbara agreed and up they went.

The pilot did all kinds of fancy manoeuvres, but not a word was heard.

He did his daredevil tricks over and over again,

But still not a word...

When they landed, the pilot turned to Stewart and said, "Amazing, I did everything I could to get you to yell out, but you didn't.

I'm impressed!"

Stewart replied, "Well, to tell you the truth I almost said something when Barbara fell out,

...but you know, seventy quid is seventy quid!"

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Karoo farmer ... she will be the first to know!

A farmer and his wife who had been married for 47 years make an appointment to see the Reverend in a Karroo town. The farmer's wife is unhappy because he never says he loves her. When the minister asks him why he doesn't tell his wife he loves her he said, "Forty seven years ago, at the altar, I told my wife I loved her. And if anything changes she will be the first to know."

With the ageing process physical needs may change but the importance of closeness and intimacy continues to be an important part of a strong relationship.

Importance of healthy relationships ... stay in touch with your partner literally and figuratively.

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Summary

"Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest treasure and confidence the greatest friend."

Lao Tsu

- 1. Paradigm has changed: Not how long will we live but how can we be happy in the process.**
- 2. Confidence our greatest friend**
- 3. Amortality.**
- 4. Normal forgetting**
- 5. Emotional fitness: Physical, social, mental and spiritual dimensions**
- 6. Below the water line /Our Inner journey, the 3Ps**
- 7. Eight things we can do to age well.**

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"Age disappears in direct proportion to the vitality of your ideas"

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We began by quoting Epicurus in Greek philosopher “..... if can face the future with confidence then we are more likely to be happy. “

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Study: What makes men happy?

75 Years In The Making: Harvard Just Released Its Epic Study On What Men Need To Live A Happy Life.

In 1938 Harvard University began following 268 male undergraduate students and kicked off the longest-running longitudinal studies of human development in history. The study’s goal was to determine as best as possible what factors contribute most strongly to human flourishing. Begun in 1938, the Grant Study of Adult Development charted the physical and emotional health of over 200 men, starting with their undergraduate days.

Three years ago, George Vaillant, who directed the study for more than three decades, published the study’s findings in the 2012 book *Triumphs of Experience*.

Reporting on all aspects of male life, including relationships, politics and religion, coping strategies, and alcohol use (its abuse being by far the greatest disruptor of health and happiness for the study’s subjects), ‘*Triumphs of Experience*’ shares a number of surprising findings. For example, the people who do well in old age did not necessarily do so well in midlife, and vice versa. While the study confirms that recovery from a lousy childhood is possible, memories of a happy childhood are a lifelong source of strength. In *Triumphs of Experience*, Vaillant raises a number of factors more often than others, **but the one he refers to most often is the powerful correlation between the warmth of your relationships and your health and happiness in your later years.**

In Vaillant’s own words, the #1 most important finding from the Grant Study is this: “The seventy-five years and twenty million dollars expended on the Grant Study points to a straightforward five-word conclusion: Happiness is love. Full stop.”

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As we close...

1. What gives your life meaning and purpose?
2. What gives you hope?
3. How do you get through tough times? Where have you found comfort?

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Living Heroically

Growing older is not about trying to find 'Youth in a bottle'. Strive to live heroically ... to function well even when we are sad or scared.

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- Helen Keller

*"Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of the overcoming of it."*

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We need to hunt the good stuff. WWW test. What Went Well? Gratitude Journal.

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Faith: For many it will be a strong faith. Faith to know that you will be given strength to be able to handle anything that comes your way.

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Written by Regina Brett in her 50's, breast cancer at 41

"To celebrate growing older, I once wrote the 45 lessons life taught me. Here are three":

1. Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
3. Life is too short – enjoy it.

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Ian Wiseman

27 January 2015

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