

**SENIOR NEIGHBORING:** In the year's reports from Women's Institutes over the province, several secretaries made comments along this line: Our members are getting older and we do not feel equal to raising a lot of funds for Institute projects. The extension services don't interest us as they might have done when we had young families to take care of. But we don't want to give up the Institute — we like the sociability and we enjoy the programs. Over the years we have tried to draw in younger members but most of our young women are working during the day and some of them already belong to more clubs than they have time for. Is it right for us to continue as a Women's Institute? And if we do, is there any way we can be of use beyond providing a social afternoon for ourselves once a month?

To begin with: Gerontologists advise us to forget our chronological age. Age, they say, is a matter of attitudes more than of years — some people at eighty are younger than others at fifty. Still, physical strength does lessen with the years; some interests go and others take their place — or they would if they were given a chance. And who can say what part of life is most important — childhood, youth, middle life or old age? Each has its part in making us what we are; each has something to give.

Where Institute members are no longer young, naturally they do not want to do a lot of strenuous catering to raise funds. One branch reports that instead of holding a bazaar and a tea to raise money for their county scholarship each member now contributes two dollars. This saves a lot of work and worry and costs little more than the baking they used to do for their tea.

It is reasonable, too, that women whose heavy housekeeping responsibilities are over, may not be interested in home economics courses. These are for young mothers with families to cook and sew for, and problems of managing a home and making ends meet. But in some places the older women have not only stirred up the young homemakers of the community to take a course but have offered to sit with their babies or entertain their runabout children during the classes.

Where older women don't want to give up the Institute because "they like the sociability and enjoy the programs," this alone might be reason enough for continuing, provided the sociability reaches out to include people who might otherwise be lonely, and the program is, in some way, a benefit. In a practical way a program on houseplants might be good or knitting patterns or quilt blocks. But what about the regular citizenship study? As long as we live we are citizens of our community, our country and the world. We vote and we carry our share of responsibility for public opinion. It should be a help to us to keep in touch with the Institute studies of Canada, of our own developing North and of our association with other parts of the world in the Freedom From Hunger campaign. If we believe in the mental therapy of "continuous learning," an Institute, whatever the age of its members, is doing something worth while if it stimulates our thinking in a discussion, sets us reading a good book, shows us films on Canadian art, gets us to listen to good radio programs and discard the others. For we have it on good authority that keeping our minds active is one of the best ways of warding off senility.

And in the way of service, there is one field — let's call it "senior neighboring" — where older women can accomplish possibly more than anyone else. It takes some experience of years to understand how to be of help to other older people. Reports show that most Women's Institutes do some entertaining of residents in County Homes; that they remember old people at Christmas time; perhaps have an annual party for the "senior citizens" of the community. An Institute whose members are "getting older" might like to concentrate on work for older people. This might mean regular personal visits to inmates of institutions or to an old person living alone, for one of the greatest needs of age is someone to talk to. It could include reading aloud or writing letters for those who can't see to read or write; or doing shopping or library service for the homebound; taking a confused person for a walk or a drive or to do shopping; inviting and bringing older women to Institute meetings; maybe sometimes having old men in, too, for the tea hour. A program of this sort could, in some measure, fill the purpose of a senior citizens' club in a community where there is no such organization.

There seems no limit to what women of imagination and some experience of living might find to do in this field of senior neighboring.

*Ethel Chapman*