

Seniors Accepting seniors status

By JOAN SCANNELL

The trouble with being a senior is that it takes a while to realize that one is a senior. I mean, the day after our 60th birthday (or 65th, according to Ottawa), we don't feel any differently than we did the week before. It is only when going somewhere like Ontario Place with son and his family, and as he's buying the entrance tickets, he calls out "Hey Mom! - you and the under-10's get in at half price," that it hits me. Indeed! I don't know if I like being equaled with the under 10's. Then, when shopping at a store when it just happens to be seniors' day, and the cashier says "seniors' discount" ... not as a question, but as a fact, I struggle with the idea of hotly disclaiming that I am a senior (worse still, look like one), or gaining the 15%.

This past Christmas, for the first time in over 40 years, I did not have the family Christmas dinner at our house. Years ago, it started out with five or six people, but over the years it has grown to a host of over twenty, including in-laws, outlaws, grandchildren, etc. So when Daughter asked us to her home this year, I was quite agreeable.

But a few moments after our arrival on THE day, I felt just like the grandmother, sitting in the rocking chair, not exactly in the corner, but definitely out of action. The little ones brought their books for me to read: I admired the new dolls and computer games, but my offers of help were tactfully refused ... well, I did bring the plum pudding and their favorite sauce.

As we were leaving to come home, I found myself rejecting this passive role, and blurted out, "Why don't you all come to dinner at our house tomorrow night?" Of course my partner was annoyed with me on the way home ... he enjoys the passive role, and knew he'd be roped in to help me. But it was quite simple really. I made a huge pot of stew without the vegetables, threw in a cupful of red wine and called it beef straganoff ... and have you tried those ready-made spicy noodles yet? A couple of loaves of crusty bread, and a large tossed salad and voila! I would prove that I could still cope.

This started me thinking of dinner at my mother-in-law's. We didn't go often, but it was understood that we always go on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, and dinner was at one o'clock in the afternoon. For me, it started early in the morning. First, I had to get the children bathed and dressed, the four boys in their grey flannels, white shirt and tie, and daughter in her Sunday best. (Our youngest hadn't arrived on the scene yet.) Then, time for a pep talk, and dire warnings if they didn't behave. It took an hour to get there, and as soon as our outside clothes were removed, we crowded into the parlour.

In this small room was a three-piece chesterfield, a large

Seniors for the Future

upright piano, and a giant aspidistra plant blotting out the light from the narrow window. On the wall was a fully framed portrait of Uncle who had died in W.W.I. My mother-in-law was a beautiful cook, and as we all sat around the dining room table, we thoroughly enjoyed the turkey dinner she had prepared. After dinner, I found it a strain.

Grandfather always had a nap after his Sunday dinner, and as my husband was in his mother's house, he felt so comfortable that he followed suit. This left Grandma and me to do the dishes, while I kept shushing the children and telling them to sit still. I had been taught that it was very rude to eat and run, so after the dishes were done I would sit for a while, talking to Grandma, with an eye on the restless boys. Then just as I would announce that we should be going, Grandfather would come in, expecting his cup of tea. We would be coaxed to stay for a cup, and a "bit of supper," which turned out to be another meal of

cold cuts, cheeses, mince tarts, etc.

Although I enjoyed it, it was still a strain, making sure that the children didn't tease the dog or knock over the fern stand. It is only since I've been a grandmother myself that I realize it probably was a strain for my mother-in-law too, and I'm quite sure now that she must have breathed a sigh of relief when we said goodbye.

However, I like to think I'm a little smarter. When I have the nearby families over, I have dinner at six, and by the time we've eaten, and the children have had a few games of hide-and-seek (coming out from under the beds, covered in dust balls) ... no grey flannels and white shirts here ... the mothers say that they must be going as it will be bedtime soon. I am quite happy to say goodbye until the next time, and if it weren't for the disturbing news we hear constantly just now, I would say that we live in a more relaxed way.

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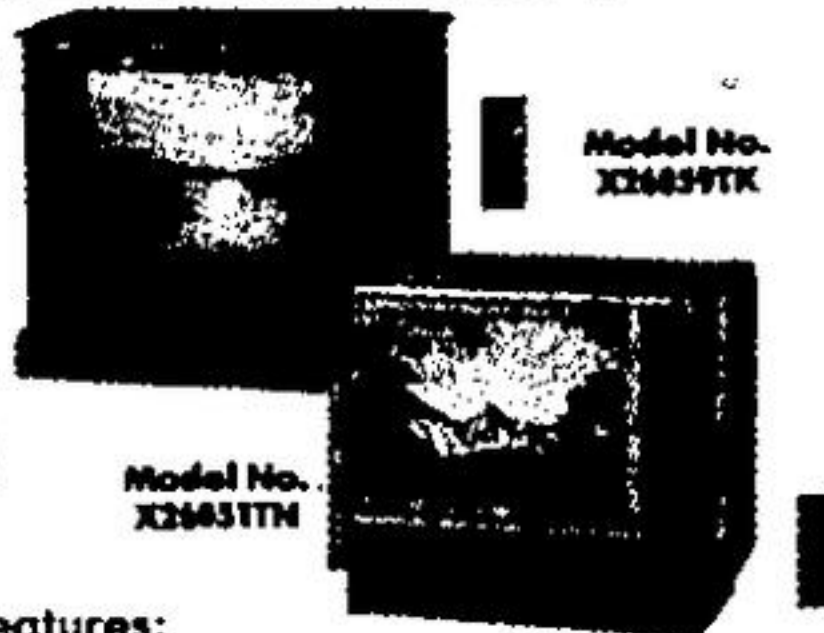
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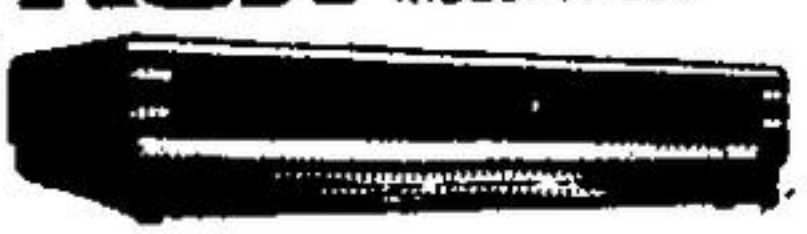
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