



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Age 65 like booby prize

There are some cultures in which senior citizens are treated like royalty. Ours isn't one of them.

Hitting 65 is like winning the booby prize at the town fair. Instead of getting the key to the city, most people enter their golden years with a key to invisibility.

They may have devoted their lives to keeping the economy going and trying to raise decent children. Maybe they nursed their kids through headaches and heartaches and probably suffered in silence about their own.

Still, in the western world aging is not always about reaping what you sow. It's not always about just rewards. It can be about shrinking worlds.

Children are told they can be or do anything they want to. Horizons are wide. Potential is limitless. You know the drill.

In the prime of life, days are busy. A typical adult has a job, a mortgage, a few kids. There aren't enough hours to care for themselves properly, so it may be a mistake to think they should be caring for the people who once used to care for them, too.

Still, if they don't, who will?

Intentions are good. The Town of Milton has a place or two for the most needy seniors. Long-term care is provided here, once you can get past the waiting list. Day programs are in place for seniors who can still line dance, play bingo and mall walk.

The in-betweeners are a little harder to accommodate. They're the seniors who aren't yet eligible for serious long-term care, but who can't always remember to eat or don't always find the will to want to.

Some programs are in place — Meals on Wheels and grocery delivery services. These are good programs, with bugs in them. The bug is human nature.

These days, everybody is always talking about stress. High school students are stressed about exams and higher education. Parents are stressed about everything under the sun.

Old people aren't supposed to be stressed.



*View
point*

with IRENE GENTLE

"This is the month to talk and write about seniors -- to soul-search and find answers."

IRENE GENTLE

They're supposed to be gallivanting off in RVs or at the very least pottering around the garden in wait of those few precious moments when their grandchildren visit.

It's a nice picture, and true for some, but for too many others, the colours aren't so bright. Stress doesn't evaporate like unlined skin when you reach a certain age.

Ill health complicates matters further. A man who may have once been in charge of a company is now told he can't drive a car.

Busses can be hard to get in and out of for bodies held together with hip or knee replacements. There is a great taxi service run by the Town but it hangs up a closed sign at 6 p.m.

A town can only do so much for its residents and I'm sure Milton does what it can. Still, there are more than 7,000 seniors in Milton today.

About 550 of them are members of the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre on Ontario Street, where programs to keep a mind and body occupied are offered daily.

Some of the rest will be happy and healthy, maybe always surrounded by family who love them. For others, growing old is about a steady shrinking of opportunities and lengthening of hours.

Some readers may know that June is Seniors' Month. This is the month to talk and write about seniors — to soul-search and find answers.

I don't have any answers — just that same, tired observation.

Some culture's treat their elderly like royalty.

This just isn't one of them.

Looking Back ...



King and queen at the annual Halton Centennial Manor Halloween party in November, 1970 were Margaret Gow and William Cripps. They're shown here with Ethel Hay and Jessie Levitt. The costumes were made by the residents themselves.

My daughter's in a clique

They call themselves the 'clique' -- our daughter and her four girlfriends. I have never experienced anything quite like this.

Our eldest was a loner in high school and he did not move in a circle of friends. I remember my high school days, too. There were four of us -- all shy, mousey girls -- who got together at lunch. We came by bus from various directions around Bancroft, so our only time for socializing came when we sat in a class room and ate our sandwiches. When I left that school midway through grade 11, that was the last I ever saw of those girls.

It's different for our daughter and her friends. They seem closer to one another and more in sync. They display a vitality I can't recall in our group. They're so enthusiastic, so full of life. They embrace new adventures wholeheartedly. They'll never forget their school art trip to New York City and they shriek in glee every time they see on TV those streets where they walked.

They are singers, dancers and actors, which often makes them bigger than life. "It's 'dahling' this and 'dahling' that. Their lack of inhibitions astounds me. They'll break into song-and-dance routines wherever and whenever. They like nothing better than to create imaginary characters and scenarios.

They live in each other's clothes. If one of our daughter's skirts cannot be found on the floor in her room, I can only assume that it is lying on the floor of one of the other girl's bedrooms.

I see a lot of these girls. Three of them live out



*On the
Homefront*

with ESTHER CALDWEL

of town, so frequently, when they have activities going on after school hours, they walk to our house and congregate in front of the TV and exclaim over the antics of Buffy the Vampire Killer. They will revisit any of the shows that our daughter has taped. Dawson's Creek comes a close second. They might also watch and sing their way through their umpteenth viewing of Dirty Dancing or West Side Story.

They react verbally to what is said and done on the small screen, as if they were involved in a real-life situation. Now that's scary. I thought it was only the guys who got drawn into TV with their spectator sports.

Their main topic of conversation seems to be other teenagers. I am aghast at how superficial they are and how quick they are to judge others. If a teen outside of their clique has a hairstyle they disagree with, it's either "scary" or "gross" and they discount any other redeeming qualities that individual might have. I criticize them for their superficiality, but I wonder really whether as adults we are any better. Don't we judge/misjudge people by their appearance? We're probably just less blatant than these kids are.

The girls crowd around the latest school yearbook, drooling over the boys, commenting on the girls -- their looks and personalities -- and complaining or raving about their teachers -- past, present and future. The pages are soon dog-eared.

They have a token boy in their midst. He lives in our neighbourhood and shows up from time to time to irritate them, boss them around and sulk when he doesn't get his way. They are hoping that one day he'll grow up and become their equals -- sophisticated as they are.

P
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by
Steve
Nease

