

Quote, Unquote

It is fitting for the last year of the millenium to be the International Year for Older Persons, with the theme 'towards a society for all ages' - a society that does not caricature older persons as pensioners, but sees them as both agents and beneficiaries of development."

(UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, 1 October 1998)

"Is it true that we had all lived more or less ordinary lives in the way that women do, or thought we had, anyway. But here we were, six women from varying backgrounds, all having made it through wars, financial ups and downs, jobs, marriages, births, deaths, divorces, disillusionments, successes, and all the public and private events of more than 60 years running, and we were claiming to have nothing of interest to say! Women in general, and old women in particular, have had our voices silenced or distorted in so many ways that it is sometimes difficult to think of words that express what is important to us. When we finally start to say them aloud, we release ourselves from the restrictions that have been put on us by others. We are affirming that our lives are important."

(The Hen Co-op, *Growing Old Disgracefully*, 1994, p. 5)

"It is common knowledge that the condition of old people today is scandalous. Before examining it in detail, we must try to understand how it comes about that society puts up with it so easily. As a general rule society shuts its eyes to all abuses, scandals and tragedies, so long as these do not upset its balance; and it worries no more about the fate of the children in state orphanages, or of juvenile delinquents, or of the handicapped, than it does about that of the aged. In the last case, however, this indifference does on the face of it seem more astonishing, since every single member of the community must know that his future is in question; and almost all of them have close personal relationships with some old people."

(Simone De Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, p. 321)

"In 1990, the world's elderly population (herein defined as those persons 60 years and older) was estimated at 488.8 million, nearly equivalent to the combined 1950 populations of Latin America, North America and the USSR. One out of eleven global inhabitants is at least 60 years of age. Out of nearly half a billion elderly, 44 per cent are male, underscoring the higher levels of mortality among the males as compared to their female counterparts."

(UN document)

"Certainly I take obvious risks living by myself at this age [eighty-three]. I could fall and break my hip without anybody knowing. I could get mugged coming home from a meeting or from shopping. Those risks are quite clear to me, but even clearer are the gains I reap from solo living. The biggest gain is that I get to keep my own ways. Nobody tells me how to be. My friends come visit often, so I have ample fun. But I don't have to rearrange my

life for anybody. I don't have to accommodate anyone else's ups and downs. That is just how I want things until death do me part.

(Simone De Beauvoir, *Never Married Women*, p. 155)

Why do people age? What causes the changes that take place in the body? How might these changes be delayed? These questions have posed a fascinating puzzle for scientists. Much research has been done in this area, and many theories have been advanced to try to explain the enigma of aging. It has been estimated that there are over 20 theories of biological aging. Nathan Shock classifies these theories into three principal categories. The first group, genetic theories, explains aging in terms of defects that occur in the transmission of information from the DNA molecules to the cells. The second group, nongenetic theories, focuses on changes that take place in the cells that interfere with their performance. The third group, physiological theories, explains aging on the basis of the malfunction of a single organ system or some impairment to the regulatory and control mechanism of the body."

(Diana K. Harris and William E. Cole, *Sociology of Aging*, 1980, p. 123)

"The ideal of independence also contains a tremendous amount of selfishness. In talking to today's young mothers, I have asked them what kind of grandmothers they are going to be. I have heard devoted, loving mothers say that when they are through raising their children, they have no intention of becoming grandmothers. They are astonished to hear that in most of the world, throughout most of its history, families have three- or four-generation families living under the same roof. We have emphasized the small family unit — father, mother, small children. We think it is wonderful if Grandma and Grandpa, if he's still alive, can live alone."

(*A New Style of Aging*, p. 44)

"Old age! Few words so spontaneously evoke so many different and contradictory concepts: old age/respect, old age/experience, old age/wisdom, old age/in full bloom, - or old age/devastation, old age/dependence, old age/at the margin; few notions are at the same time intimate (one's own old age) and universal because old age is everyone's fate."

(Jeannine Jacquemin, *Elderly Women: Living at the Margin or in Full Bloom*, p. 7)

"The difficulties in readjustment after the loss of a spouse, the loss of a job, or the loss of health, are accentuated when our friends become fewer as we grow older. Our own increasing rigidity and insistence on regularity often limit our social contacts. Physical difficulties make the maintenance of friendships difficult. When we lose our jobs, we lose many social contacts. We or our friends are likely to move away and there are fewer and fewer old people around. If we have lost our homes, it is more difficult to entertain and more difficult to meet new friends to replace those who have gone."

(Clark Tibbitts (ed.), *Living through the Older Years*, 1949, pp. 92-93)