

Tips for keeping your mind, body engaged

By JANE GLENN HAAS

Published: May 27, 2011

We grow older. And what's ahead?

Boomers are turning 65 at the rate of one every seven seconds.

In the U.S., the 2010 Census brief shows that the median age of Americans is now 37.2 – with seven states – Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, New Hampshire, Florida, Pennsylvania and Connecticut – recording a median age of 40-plus.

And the University of Florida says nearly 16 million Americans are trying to balance work and elder caregiving responsibilities just as the number of older persons is about to skyrocket. A study by the National Alliance of Caregiving/AARP estimates businesses next year will suffer a \$29 billion loss in productivity due to elder caregiving demands. It's the flip side of the childcare demands of workers 20 years ago.

What's it all mean?

It means we all have a job to do. At every age. We need to stay healthy and productive. We can't sit around and expect others to pick up the slack for us.

If we do our job well – and if we have the right genes – we can be active and interesting and contributing members of society until well over 100. Which is an amazing concept! A nation of Abrahams and Sarahs, as one minister points out as he weds a couple in their 90s – and yes, the bride wore white.

Last week, I went to a KOCE/PBS and AARP presentation of the documentary "After 90 and Loving It." The program – this one shown at the Huntington Beach Library – is airing as part of the spring 2011 lineup on public TV stations.

Is this the Boomer future? I hope so.

For 57 minutes, we saw people in their 90s and 100s who are living what must be dubbed "extraordinary and passionate lives." Filmmaker Susan Polis Schultz interviewed them all – from folk singer Pete Seeger (who gets his exercise splitting cord wood) to Nola Ochs, who received her master's degree three months before her 99th birthday.

One of my favorites, Katie Brown, 91, drives to her job in a mall each morning where she readies cinnamon rolls for sale. Laura Simon, 101, is working on the second book about her life, while Granny D (Doris Haddock), who walked across the country 10 years ago as a political activist, remains involved and unstoppable.

Then there's Harry Rakoff, a New York cab driver at 94, and Les Lieber, 96, playing his saxophone for Jazz at Noon every Friday in a New York club.

This is a great study of the positives and benefits of an aging society. And while we're all not as physically capable – even at a younger age – of many of these nonagenarians, they force us to admit there is little to keep us from improving with age. And I don't mean by sitting on a shelf.

Promoters of this PBS special say there is a prescription for healthy aging reflected in these lives. They cite 10 points these elders share:

- Maintain a positive attitude and focus on the positive. Don't worry about anything.
- Embrace maturity. Don't think about how old you are. In fact, forget about it.
- Keep doing things. Work hard following your passions.
- Stay curious about the future but stay engaged in the present.
- Make a difference in the lives of others.
- Don't focus on yourself.
- Keep physically active and maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- Choose to be around people who are positive.
- Avoid people who are negative.
- Don't be afraid of death. Think of it as it is – something very natural and inevitable.

Good points to reflect upon. And reflect I did – through gritted teeth – as I drove myself and two other ladies of more advanced years to the library event.

They told me where to turn. They blamed someone else when they sent me in the wrong direction. They said, "Just turn on your flasher and wiggle like you want to change lanes," when I needed to move over on the freeway. They even pointed out where I should park, at the clearly marked handicapped spot.

Some day – sooner than I would like – I will be of the age of these two. And if I am careful and do as I'm told now, I'll still be on the streets and byways.

They're physically and mentally active. They're positive ladies. They're not focused on themselves. They are engaged community volunteers.

I try to ignore the obvious — they could "volunteer" their driving information to someone else. But we got there and back.

"I've never had so many back seat drivers," I said.

"So many?" one of them replied. "There are only two of us."

Which is another point about aging. Clearly these women see the world differently than their boomer daughters do now or will in the future.

Does that mean no more backseat drivers? I'm doubtful.

Meanwhile, I'm turning on my blinker as usual, when I want to change lanes. Some parts of our lives are not age related.

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