

# Notes to Self on Growing Older

## By Kate Hadley

*Character Building* is a book for parents that describes a series of virtues, outlining which ones are appropriate to emphasize at different ages. Similarly there are virtues that we need to prioritize as we grow older.

Cheerfulness  
Optimism  
Hope  
Affection  
Trust

Sense of Humor  
Acceptance of limitations  
Care for the others  
Piety

### **Some Thoughts on how to live these virtues:**

- Keep your sense of humor; if it is not well-developed, work on it!
- As you age you become 'more' of what you are. So know your strengths and weaknesses.
- Be the kind of person others want to be around: funny, cheerful, kind, interested in the others.
- Ask for corrections, it keeps you humble and ensures people are not afraid of you and your reactions.
- Admit freely if you made a mistake, even if you only MIGHT have made a mistake. Take it on yourself. Be the bigger person. Don't get defensive.
- Accept back-seat driving and corrections about your driving. What a splendid mortification!
- Laugh when your children tease you or make fun of your foibles.
- When we feel our freedom is being limited by others we often get irritated and defensive. But try to trust other's judgement. If they are worried about you doing certain things (eg., walking the dog) talk it out. Don't just insist or get defensive.

Compromise. Try to understand what it is they are concerned about and find a win-win solution.

### **ACCEPTANCE OF REALITY:**

-Accept that you will gradually decline: hearing, vision, strength, reaction time, memory... Don't get angry about it.

-Accept that your hearing is declining. Be kind in asking for repeats. But do stay in the conversation. Don't withdraw.

-Your memory WILL fail. If someone says you have forgotten something you probably have!

-You are not always right. Sometimes you are, but be open to the chance you aren't!

-Offer up the humiliation of being wrong or looked at with pity.

-Does wanting to look pretty or strong keep you from using oxygen or some other health assistance?

-Accept household help, if only for your familie's sake! Or the stair-lift or the "walking stick" or the walker..... It actually keeps you MORE independent.

- Your children do not want to take away your freedom. They want to support you. They are not the enemy.

### **LONELINESS:**

-If they don't visit enough offer it up. What a beautiful way to accompany Jesus on the Cross.

-Go places; don't sit at home. Get out even if it is just a walk or a drive. Even if it seems you are putting others out if they have to drive you or you walk slowly.

-Let yourself be helped. We all like to be needed. That is how YOU are needed! Let THEM feel needed. It might sound like "Pollyanna" but it is TRUE: You are not a burden to someone when you're old (IF you try to be cheerful, kind and!); you are an opportunity for them to take care of someone. If you don't believe me think of all the testimonies you have seen from the families who have children with Downs. It's not just babies who have worth but the elderly also!

-Try new things. Snorkling! Electric biking. A new hobby.

-If you don't pine for something else it makes you happier; be happy in the moment with what you have.

-Don't make spouse or children promise not to place you in an institution. Express your preference but don't dictate

-Live wherever is easiest for your kids; don't insist on staying in your home if it complicates their lives.

-They have their own lives. You can't expect them to entertain you.

What else are you needed for?

-Prayer IS powerful; don't discount it even if it is the only way you can help.

-Be careful when you tell someone you will pray for them-that they will take it the right way; not that they need fixing, for eg. (but still pray for them!)

### **DETACHMENT FROM THINGS**

-Don't keep stuff you will never use again—unless it is that special thing that gives you pleasure and stirs warm memories. It is different for each person. It is a balance between archiving and hoarding!

-I think it is funny that no one wants “brown furniture” any more. Even if it is mahogany and gorgeous! Identify the pieces that mean a lot to you and write their provenance on them somewhere. That can make a difference in how they are perceived.

-Another trick is to wait a few years and then sometimes things are not as important to you.

-*The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning* by Margareta Magnusson is the Marie Kondo for old people!

### **DETACHMENT FROM IDEAS:**

-If it doesn't offend God let it go. Even if it does, you still might have to let it go, but YOU can always do reparation!

-When you are struggling with your reactions don't let others see.

-Don't discount other people's ideas even if you have tried them before.

-Keep your filters. Yes, it is nice to not care what others think about you any more like a teenager does, BUT think of THE OTHERS and keep your filters. Don't say things just because you thought it. Or it NEEDS to be said. Be kind.

-Ask about others' activities.

-Be like Tanta, don't complain. Especially about the state of the world. When society changes it's not always bad; some things change for the better

-Listen. Respect the opinions of the young people in your life. Engage them respectfully.

### **GRANDCHILDREN (or nieces and nephews)**

-Be a Grandma like Anita Dolan; be accepting and full of love, Bring them in for individual conversations

-Your job is to pray for your grandkids, but don't tell them that they "need" it! Pray for their vocations. Pray for their future spouses. Pray for their fidelity to Jesus.

-Ask grandchildren for help. It's a great opportunity to interact with them.

-Don't preach and send articles. At least not in a preachy-teachy-way and not a lot of them!

-Keep connected so you don't get lonely. Letters, postcards, phone calls.

-Be a grandma to your grandchildren, not a parent. Support them. Don't be critical. Shower them with affection.

-Respect your children's ways of parenting. Don't undermine them, even with candy!

-Enjoy the naïveté and idealism of young people. It is hopeful and refreshing. Idealism is important. That is what inspires youth and changes the world for the better.

-Let them take your picture; grandkids have only seen you old/fat and they love you as you are.

### ***Rules for Seniors Living with Family***

- Do not think of yourself as a model to be followed.
- You are not the leader of another man's family.
- You are not an alternative parent.
- Be useful but respect the family's normal interaction.
- Contribute to family life through the Cardinal Virtues
- Be happy.
- Avoid gloom.
- Be hopeful.
- Give and show affection.
- Do not nag or probe too deeply.
- Kid up.
- Pray
- Make a sacrifice each day for the family
- Show prudence in the use of language.
- Get to know the neighbors.
- Say thank you.
- Be prompt with you monthly contribution to the household.
- Allow yourself to be dependent only when necessary.
- Make your bed first thing in the morning.
- Keep your spaces orderly.
- Dress appropriately and neatly.
- Clean up after yourself and don't leave your things around.
- Respect privacy as much as possible.

### ***Some Sensible Ideas about Living WITH Seniors***

- Do not patronize older persons.
- Respect 'age' itself.
- Do not be over solicitous.
- Close the door.
- Your parents come first.
- Seek advice when appropriate.
- Look for the positive aspects of our presence.
- Keep us in your information loop.
- Be open and share your doubts.
- Share friendship with us.
- We're not bored; we're sleepy.
- Ask questions about persons and things of the past.
- Respect our concerns.
- Grandparents are allowed to make mistakes too.

***What Grandchildren Appreciate, Desire, and Need from their Grandparents (in their own words)***

- Past adventures, jobs, ambitions
- Kind and caring
- A solid foundation in Faith
- The value of a good education
- Overflowing with patience, understanding and compassion
- Offered guidance
- Sense of humor
- Work together
- Cheerful
- Strong, confident
- Not intimidating
- Spent time with me
- Hugs and my first \$10 bill
- Polite, humble, courteous, charitable
- Hospitality, celebration
- Joyful attitude
- Dignified, self-deprecating
- Encouraging
- Intellectual rigor
- Welcoming smile
- The value of a virtuous life
- Felt special
- Family history/scrapbooks
- Zest for life
- Shared interests

**Resources:**

- 1) SNL skit on YouTube called Amazon Echo Silver  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvT\\_gqs5ETk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvT_gqs5ETk)
- 2) *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande
- 3) *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning* by Margareta Magnusson