

# The CRISIS of OLD AGE...

## *Everyone's Problem*

*Senior citizens have more of almost everything — more health problems, more financial problems, more housing problems, more need for transportation, more loneliness. They lack what they need most — a meaningful place in the mainstream of society. Can the problems the elderly face be resolved?*

by Richard Gipe

“**A**S A senior citizen, what is your biggest worry?” PLAIN TRUTH staff writers asked a number of elderly interviewees. Almost all gave “not enough money” as their chief concern.

Others mentioned related problems — difficulty in finding a job, rising health costs, a housing shortage.

### The Problem of Money

We asked James Carbray, an expert on the problems of senior citizens, “What is the major problem facing our elderly?”

His answer: “If you wanted to confine it to the greatest problem, I think you would have to say in great measure it’s a lack of sufficient income.”

Ted Ellsworth, Administrator of the Center for Labor Research and Education for the Institute of Industrial Relations, UCLA, answered the same question.

“The main problem,” this administrator said, “of course, is INCOME, the high cost of living, high taxes, inflation, with incomes that are no longer flexible — they’re set incomes — and this, of course, is the main problem.

“Health is the secondary problem, secondary only in the sense it’s secondary to income.” He also mentioned lack of good nutrition and poor housing as problems of senior citizens.

### Getting to the Root Problem

There is no doubt that these are grave physical difficulties. They do cause the elderly anguish and suffering. But consider a moment — these are only effects — not causes!

Poor health is merely an *effect* — an effect of the lifetime habit of poor nutrition or of physical injury. Loneliness is an *effect* — an effect of not being wanted or needed. Poverty is an *effect* — an effect of the inability to save money throughout life in preparation for old age.

Poor health, loneliness, and poverty are also effects of a yet more basic, underlying cause. These effects could be removed if we understood the purpose for life and grasped the proper role of the elderly in our society.

But few are concerned with such long-range issues in a youth-oriented society. Being old in a society that worships youth can mean loneliness, isolation and poverty.

Most studies and plans to solve the problems of the elderly have not been able to center any reforms around this basic concept. The reason, of course, is easy to see. It would require putting into practice a revolutionary new social order.

Most programs to help the aged deal with their immediate physical problems only. They have ended in frustration, a

frustration that has plagued nations throughout history.

Many nations and governmental leaders ask, “How do we solve the seemingly insurmountable problems of inadequate income, poor health, lack of proper nutrition, lack of housing, not enough transportation?”

### Presidential Conference on Aging

U.S. President Nixon called for a White House Conference in late 1971 to consider the needs and role of the elderly.

When first discussing the conference, the President said: “We have made progress in meeting the needs of older people, but there still are many serious and UNSOLVED problems . . . the major and overriding problem is that we as a people have not developed a *real philosophy of aging*.”

A “philosophy of aging”? What would it mean in a society that is primarily concerned with — and indeed worships — youth?

Where do the elderly fit into our society? What about their skills and wisdom? How can those in middle age prepare for the future?

### A Massive Problem

The problem of aging is massive — both from the magnitude of the diffi-

culties involved and the sheer weight of numbers of citizens involved.

There are over 20 million Americans, 8 million Britons, one million Australians and over one and a half million Canadians aged 65 or older.

In Britain, tens of thousands of older people are living in abject squalor, without even basic amenities.

According to a recent report published by the British Help the Aged Organization: "One and a half million old people live alone and 300,000 are in urgent need of sheltered accommodation — groups of flatlets supervised by a warden.

"350,000 are without any of the three basic facilities — the use of a bath, kitchen, or indoor lavatory.

"Two million old people have access to only an outside lavatory. Nearly 300,000 have no lavatory at all.

"Well over one million have only piped cold water.

"Britain has nearly 8½ million people over the age of retirement — but there is no overall plan to ensure their

health, welfare and general comfort should their family circumstances leave them vulnerable."

The report went on to say: "With the annual increase of some 100,000 in the number of retired people, we can only ignore this situation at our peril." For many of these British senior citizens, health, poverty and loneliness are problems now!

The elderly in other lands have similar problems to one degree or another.

### Future Senior Citizens

In the United States, 18,000,000 Americans in the 55-to-64 age group will soon face the problems of retirement and health.

Behind this group is another army of 24,000,000 men and women in the 45-to-54 age category. Within 10 to 20 years they too will be senior citizens.

Every day some 900 Americans — 330,000 persons per year — are added to the rolls of the senior citizen group. Many quickly find themselves wrestling with the problems of making ends meet

on a fixed income, finding new constructive goals in life, and caring for their health.

What should be done to solve the financial problems, the problems of shelter, transportation, housing, education — especially a proper place in society — which cause so much anguish among the elderly?

### Place in Society

These problems would be solved if man understood the proper role which the elderly should play in society. The *raw loneliness* of many in the older generation — stemming from a feeling they are no longer a part of the mainstream of life — is so very often a direct result of misunderstanding the proper role for the elderly. Theirs becomes a give-up attitude.

Not all, of course. But for the broad majority the feeling that there is no future — that life is already finished or just about over — is constantly in mind.

Many elderly feel they have not been successful at life and that life is not

# PROBLEMS OF THE AGED

## HEALTH

A major overriding problem of the elderly is the problem of poor physical health.

Wrote Edgar May, in his book, *The Wasted Americans*, 1964, "Our senior citizens are sick more frequently and for more prolonged periods than the rest of the population. Of every 100 persons age 65 or over, 80 suffer some kind of chronic ailment, 28 have heart disease or high blood pressure, 27 have arthritis or rheumatism, 10 have impaired vision, and 17 have hearing impairments. Sixteen are hospitalized one or more times annually. They require three times as many days of hospital care every year as persons under the age of 65" (p. 94).

All in all, the aged spend on the average *twice* as much money for medical care as do younger Americans.

According to the Office of Health Economics, obesity is another problem among the elderly. In Great Britain, for example, 51 percent of the males and 59 percent of the females 60 to 69 are overweight. Of all the curses that shorten life and restrict health, overweight comes first.

Four out of five suffer constantly from at least one, often more than one, chronic condition. And accident rates go up with age, causing many forms of illness and disability among the elderly.

## POVERTY

A full one third of the elderly are eking out an existence at or below poverty level. The median income for a single person over 65 in the U. S. is \$1,055 per year, for a couple it is \$2,530. In the United States more than two million subsist on Social Security alone. A surprisingly large number of others qualify for Social Security but are not getting it because they *don't know they qualify*.

On welfare in the U. S., the average maximum draw is \$184.00 monthly. To get this maximum draw for Old Age Assistance one has to be a very special case.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics corroborated this by compiling a "modest but adequate" budget for the average elderly couple. They priced the basic items considered necessary to life in 20 major cities in the United States, then averaged the costs. Based on this budget the average elderly couple would need \$3,010 a year to have even a modest living. Thus with their \$2,530 average annual income the average couple does not have enough for even a modest budget. Of course there are variations, but this should give some idea of the problems of poverty many elderly face.

In order to have any type of physically rewarding life at all, an elderly person in this society usually must find some way to augment his income. There are many things that can be done, but what it really boils down to is this: 1) he must either lower his expenses, or 2) find a part-time income, or some other means to supplement his regular income.



worth living any more. They often feel unwanted or unneeded by either family or society. They feel they are contributing nothing to this world.

A few busy themselves spending their savings, shutting out the reality of life — poor health, poverty and imminent death become inescapable realities. Only the few feel they have lived an abundant, satisfying life — and live out their remaining years in productivity and peace of mind.

Where does loneliness lead the elderly? Often it leads to *suicide!* The highest rate of suicides for any age group is found among the elderly, particularly men.

WHY? The answer is quite clear. The elderly need success as any other person of any other age group needs success. Yet, often the elderly are the least successful people on earth!

But WHY? WHY are the elderly discarded from society to live generally *non-productive* lives? The answer is twofold.

### The "Old People" Concept

Our society has a mental concept into which all elderly — and many not so elderly — are automatically crammed. What is — or was — your mental concept of the elderly in general? The average person views an elderly person as one who has wrinkled skin, who may have lost most or all of his teeth. If he has any hair it is probably gray. This person supposedly has a poor memory for recent events. He is considered by many to be uneducated or dull — one whose health is gone and who has no vigor or energy.

The elderly supposedly cannot concentrate, ramble when they talk, and have lost all competence for any occupation — no matter how minor.

But how many of the elderly really fit this mental concept? Some official estimates say 10% at most! About 5% of the 65-plus generation are residing in nursing and rest homes. Another 5% are estimated to be bed-ridden shut-ins! But even these people do not necessarily fit the stock image of an "old person."

Nevertheless, the "older-person-is-useless" concept has taken root. This is one reason why older people are progressively shut off from the mainstream of society — why 65 is often chosen as the place to *forcefully* retire employees.

The other reason why older people become non-producers has to do with the mental attitude of the elderly *themselves*. They have accepted this concept of themselves — that old people degenerate physically and mentally. As a result, they often take *themselves* out of society — without even realizing it!

### "I'm Too Old"

These three words create many needless problems for the elderly — and worry for those who are in middle age or beyond.

Dr. David Joseph Schwartz, Ph.D., author of *The Magic of Thinking Big*, wrote, "It's surprising how few people feel they are 'just right' age wise. And it's unfortunate. This excuse has closed the door of real opportunity to thousands of individuals. They think their

## RETIREMENT

Retirement is taking a great deal of the older generation out of the U. S. Labor Force. In 1900, two thirds of all men 65 years and older were working. Currently, according to Bureau of Labor statistics, only one tenth are!

According to these facts, more are retiring. But do they want to? Or are they being forced into retirement? Executives of many manufacturing firms complain of having trouble getting their employees to retire at 65 when they could have retired at 55. Companies are discovering that the vast majority of blue- and white-collar workers who could retire early simply don't want to!

One psychiatrist put it this way: "The trend to earlier retirement can only lead to an increase in mental illness. When people have one of their main aims in life — work — taken away, their incentive is gone. They feel useless."

Many realize that retirement and a life of leisure is not the answer. A man who has spent the past 30 to 50 years on the job cannot be "put out to pasture." The change is just too great.

Of course, for vast numbers, the years spent on a job have not been fulfilling. Perhaps it would be best for them to make the break, switch to something they would enjoy more, perhaps on a part-time basis.

In this society the wisest move any elderly or middle-aged person can make is to plan for his plus-65 years well in advance. The lack of planning has caused untold heartache and misery for far too many elderly already.

## NUTRITION

One of the major contributors to health problems is the lack of proper nutrition among the elderly. Medical journals state that 75% of our senior population suffers from malnutrition. Some studies reveal that most people over sixty suffer from six to eight nutritional deficiencies. But why do we have such a tragic situation in the Western World?

Many older people have retreated into isolation. They are frightened, confused, and don't feel useful. They develop malnutrition simply because they lack the interest in eating meals alone. Serious health problems can result from malnutrition. Many have not been properly educated as to what constitutes a balanced and nutritious meal.

United States Government programs such as "Meals on Wheels," and "Hot Meals for the Elderly" have been created to combat this problem. But, for lack of funds these programs can reach only a limited number for a limited time in a limited way.

Yet, health is imperative to success of any kind. Even in the latter years one should continue some form of exercise and watch his diet so he may have good health. *Man is what he eats!*

Many physicians and surgeons have said that 90 to 95 percent of all sickness and disease comes from a faulty diet! This area, as so many others, badly needs action.

Poor health is merely an *effect* — an effect of the lifetime habit of poor nutrition or of physical injury. The normal condition of the human body, even during advanced age should be one of robust health, not sickness.

## HOUSING

Two thirds of all elderly live in cities. One third are estimated to be living in the deteriorating cores of our large cities. Many are forced to reside in cheap and dirty housing accommodations. Often they share bathroom, refrigerator and telephone. Only five percent of the 20 million elderly live in an institution or rest home. As mentioned, another five percent in addition to these are bedridden shut-ins.

One fourth are residing in rural areas. Aside from the one in twenty-five living in a rest home, seventeen of every twenty-five American Senior Citizens live with some member of their families (wife or other relative). Nearly seven in twenty-five live with someone not related, or alone!

Recent Census Bureau reports for April 1970 show a sharp gain in the number of older people living alone, away from their families. The number of persons 65 and older who are living alone or with others who are not related increased from 3.2 million in 1960 to 5.2 million in 1970 — an increase of 61%.

A good many of the people over 65 own their own homes. Usually these homes are clear of mortgage debt, but often old, and in bad need of repairs. Many times they are too large for the needs of the elderly. And property taxes never end.

In Britain many of the aged are still residing in the old workhouses which were supposed to be abolished in 1948. Others are staying in post-war homes, voluntary homes, institutions, old people's homes, and a few in their own private homes.

age is wrong, so they don't even bother to try . . . HOW OLD WE ARE IS NOT IMPORTANT. It's one's attitude toward age that makes it a blessing or a barricade" (pp. 31-32).

How many times have you heard someone say, "I'm too old!" Or half jokingly say, "Well, you can't teach an old dog new tricks." This old age excusitis plagues many citizens. It need not — because it is based on a tragic fallacy.

It is a common belief, especially among the elderly, that as the body grows old, the mind ages *right along with* the worn-out body. According to this idea, first the memory starts to fade, and eventually senility will claim the entire mind. In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth!

Most people are led to believe that their productive years end around 65, at which time they should retire, making room for a new generation.

**MOST PEOPLE ARE WRONG!**

### The Importance of the Mind

One reason why it appears that the mind deteriorates is that it has in many cases been allowed to deteriorate — as most people allow the body to deteriorate — through disuse. Result? By age 65 many people are not as productive mentally as they could be.

But it *should not be* this way.

By far and away the two major contributors to senility are: 1) our industry-predicated society which restricts thinking and using the mind, except for the few, and 2) a lifetime of improper diet, lack of exercise and other health-wrecking habits. These cause a massive deterioration of the physical body, resulting in senile human beings.

Then, too often the "declining years" are spent in a rest home where boredom sometimes leads to further needless senility, as in the following example.

Here is part of a dialogue between a reporter and an elderly person in a rest home. The elderly person could be from anywhere. This problem is not restricted to any region, or for that matter any nation. It affects a significant minority of the elderly. It is graphic evidence of what can happen to an elderly person who has not actively used his mind.

INTERVIEWER: How do you approach each day? Do you look forward to it and what do you look forward to the most?

ELDERLY WOMAN: I don't know. Nothing special.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any contact with your family?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Nothing special.

INTERVIEWER: Does your family live near here?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Yes, they live near here but we don't visit together very often.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been here?

ELDERLY WOMAN: How long have I been here? I don't know. I've been here several years. I can't remember when I came here now.

INTERVIEWER: What do you enjoy most every day?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Getting out.

INTERVIEWER: Getting outside?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Yeah. Walking up and down.

INTERVIEWER: Do you get any exercise every day?

ELDERLY WOMAN: No, I don't.

INTERVIEWER: What is the most exciting thing you do every day?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Work.

INTERVIEWER: What do you work at?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Everything.

INTERVIEWER: You do various things?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Yes. I just keep the home in order and look forward for better times and so on, you know, just trying to fix everything better.

INTERVIEWER: Have you known Mrs. Woody (another person in the home) long?

ELDERLY WOMAN: No, not very long. I just know her for a short time. I really don't know her very much.

INTERVIEWER: But you enjoy yourself here?

ELDERLY WOMAN: Yes, I enjoy it here.

This woman could have had a more productive life with responsibilities that would have warded off senility.

### Active Minds

Now contrast this, for example, with the life of Konrad Adenauer, who be-

came West Germany's Chancellor at the age of 69 and died while still active at age 91. Adenauer was health conscious all of his life.

Or take the fabulous life of Sir Winston Churchill. Sir Winston was well over 65 before he reached his height of productive power.

At the age of 65, the name of Winston Churchill was all but unknown to the populace of the United States. As Europe was facing her darkest hour, as the very existence of Britain was in doubt, Churchill came on the scene. What if he had said, "Sorry, I have retired, I am just too old."

In a book by Clarence B. Randall titled *Sixty-Five Plus*, the author had this to say of Churchill: "His life reached its greatest usefulness at sixty-five plus, and then went on growing through seventy-five plus.

"At forty he was bold, but reckless, facile of speech, but unseasoned in judgment. *Not until his very senior years did he reach the unshakeable peak of leadership*" (page 11). Fortunate were Britain, Europe and America that Winston Churchill was old enough to have good judgment when this crisis came along!

Churchill was a renowned historian *and* an accomplished painter. He did not let his mind stagnate.

There are, of course, many such examples of over-65-year-old producers. Charles de Gaulle ruled France and Chiang Kai-shek created a new nation on Taiwan in the time of life when most men are thinking of retiring.

But you say, "These were world renowned leaders. They were highly educated. What about common people like us?" Obviously, only a few have the magnitude of ability — and the chance — for world renown. But ALL CAN APPLY these same principles. Many are not nearly so limited as they think they are. Everyone can use his abilities — however limited they may appear — to his fullest capacity.

To do so is extremely important. The mind *must* continue to be used and developed — or it deteriorates.

Dr. Irving Lorge, a psychologist at Columbia University ran a series of tests conclusively proving that older people

for years lose nothing in mental power if they *keep up their active interests*. "Your body gets old," Dr. Lorge says, "but not your mind IF YOU CARE TO USE IT. The mind never retires!"

All too many of our elderly have been sidetracked by society and have not made adequate use of their minds. They do not keep up any active interests. The mind is allowed to grow old with the body, when it doesn't have to. And this actually increases the aging process of the body.

### Where Elderly Fit in Society

What can an older person do to be a productive member of the human race? What can he do to avoid poverty, ill health, loneliness, housing problems?

For some of these problems there just are no ideal solutions in the present structure of society. Something is wrong with society — but human leaders haven't learned what it is that needs correction. Governments are desperately struggling to provide merely the physical needs. They have little or no time to worry about providing a meaningful existence or a place in society — or to question whether society needs to be changed. Governments usually just appropriate money and then wonder why the problem doesn't vanish.

The "philosophy of aging" — the role of the elderly in our society — is an enigma to government leaders. There are definite REASONS why.

"A secure position for the aged can exist only under conditions that *CAN-NOT BE FOUND* in a modern industrial society," wrote Ben Seligman in his book, *Permanent Poverty, An American Syndrome*.

"If the aged owned or controlled property," he continued, "on which younger persons depended, if they were transmitters of culture who held key blocks of knowledge, if they provided significant links to the past, if the extended family were still central to our mode of life, if our society were tradition oriented, and if the output of the aged were in any way economically useful, then the aged would still be honored" (pages 64-65).

There you have it, in a nutshell. Here stated are the vital ingredients to a soci-

ety in which the aged could have the dignity, respect and place necessary to life. And yet, these very ingredients are generally not to be found in our modern, technologically oriented society.

These ingredients can be found only in a family-oriented society.

### Role of the Aged — Past, Present and Future

In the past, the attitude toward the aged members of society has differed greatly from culture to culture. The ancient Hebrews and Greeks, among others — and the Scots, Irish and Chinese until very recently — operated under patriarchal societies and showed great respect for the elderly. The influence of that system is still felt among many of their descendants.

Among other civilizations, on the other hand, it was the accepted custom to abandon the aged and leave them to die. Among the Chukchi Siberian tribe, for example, it was the sacred duty of the son to take his own father's life when his powers began to wane. The father encouraged his son to carry out this obligation. The Eskimos at one time froze their old people to death. Other societies marooned their elderly at sea, or left them to die on a mountain top.

Every nation and every epoch has found its own method of dealing with its old-age problems.

### The Method of the Ancient Hebrews

The most workable and truly honorable system historically recorded is that of the ancient Hebrews. The Hebrews had a "national philosophy on aging" which provided a "meaningful place in society" for the elderly.

In effect, the Hebrew law fulfilled every one of Ben Seligman's points previously quoted. The aged did own and control property. As a matter of fact, there was a law that forbade the selling of one's inherited family property. Their law stated, "The field of the suburbs of their cities may *not be sold*, for it is their perpetual possession" (Lev. 25:34). The head of the family controlled the family estate until he died.

This one law alone is far-reaching in its effect. Where there is land, there is

the possibility of food from the land. This law also controlled what we might term "Modern Technology." Industry was spread out in family shops, which gave industrial families the same social structure as those in rural areas.

The real key to success for the ancient Hebrew nation was a strong emphasis on family unity! The elderly were well cared for and the grandchildren received priceless training.

### When Elderly Are Important

In effect, the Hebrews utilized a "Patriarchal System" in which the elderly owned and controlled the land. When they died the land inheritance went to the eldest son, or was divided among the children. There were no retirement villages, no segregation by age. The young depended on the old, and they loved their grandparents as long as they lived according to the law.

The elderly were transmitters of culture, and they taught the young. They held key blocks of knowledge. The elderly were encouraged to study, keep themselves active, continue learning so they would be wise and able to offer counsel. The most important job the elderly could possibly do was teach the young. This forced them to keep their minds active and alert.

For the ancient Hebrews, the *past was important*. They realized the importance of history. They taught and retaught the lessons learned in their history. Traditions were handed down from father to son, or grandfather to grandson. Thus history did not need to repeat itself, mistakes did not need to recur. The elderly held and provided these significant links to the past. They preserved not only national history but family history and genealogy which gave everyone a sense of unity and made life more meaningful.

The family was the center of their mode of life. Their society *was* tradition oriented . . . and the output of the aged *was* economically useful. More important, they were respected, honored and loved. There has never been a nation in which the elderly had more honor, respect and dignity than in this ancient nation of Israel. The Scots, Irish and Chinese applied the same principles in

more recent times with the same benefits.

### Parents Providing For Children

Care for the aged was strictly commanded. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man" (Lev. 19:32). Respect was commanded and rigidly enforced as long as the law was followed.

Today we point the finger at the children and say, "You ought to be providing for your parents"! The Hebrew Law stated: "For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (Prov. 13:22; II Cor. 12:14). Today, in modern America, the children are taxed to care for their parents. Thus the elderly have to be provided for by their children. What honor is that?

No government today has been able to care adequately for all its older people. That is and ought to be — where possible — a family matter, and should be handled as such! The proper principle, if there is need to care for the elderly, was laid down by a student of the Hebrew law, the Apostle Paul: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8). In short, family ought to care for family!

But what of those older people having no family? This also was taken into consideration. Rather than an elaborate tax system reaching into the pockets of the citizens for huge percentages of

their incomes, this ancient Hebrew nation, Israel, had a specified percent of the income of the nation assessed to cover areas of need for those with no visible means of support (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29).

In ancient Israel, the elderly held key positions in the community, as "elders" who handled many public responsibilities requiring judgment. As a result they had the esteem, respect and honor of those around them. Old age was something looked forward to, "the latter years, for which the first were made."

Respect for parents was considered so important it is one of the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment says, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).

Precepts of sound finances and detailed health laws were commanded to be diligently taught. As a result, poverty could be virtually eliminated and citizens had good health — even throughout their senior years.

This ancient Hebrew system attacked the ROOT CAUSE of the problems of the elderly. Its laws could be applied today. Except, as mentioned, it would require a revolutionary new approach to problems. And few are willing, much less able, to put sweeping reforms into effect.

If our nations were willing to do so, we would literally be the talk of the

world. Other nations would marvel — be eager to understand HOW we resolved the seemingly UNresolvable problems of the elderly.

We, like the Hebrew nation that was instructed in these basic concepts, would be a model nation to the world. "Keep therefore and do them" — the Hebrews were told concerning the various statutes — "for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, *Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people*" (Deut. 4:6, 7).

Unless and until those laws are applied we shall have our elderly poor, our elderly with health problems, our lonely and non-productive old people.

Obviously, you as an individual cannot change all of society. However, personally, you can do something about YOUR situation. The most important action you can take is to discover how to *make* your life successful while there is still time.

If you would like to understand the principles of success — and how you can apply them in your life now — write for our FREE booklet *The Seven Laws of Success*. It will help you get started on the right track. □

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