

was respect without affection, veneration without love. Old age was exalted by

# ING OLD



Ann Osborn



few people talk to him nowadays. He's in his 70s. Between his social security and a small pension from his years as a warehouse worker, he gets about \$1,900 a year. His room costs \$125 a month, including heat and electricity. Fortunately he only pays two-thirds of that. A federal program pays the rest.

The only clothes I see (besides the green work shirt and pants he's wearing) are two shirts on the bed and a navy blue sweater hanging on the doorknob. I ask him about the big freeze last year. Was there enough heat in the building?

He says the heat stayed on all winter. "But those kids broke my window, and no one came to fix it for a week. And then," he shakes his head, smiling sadly, "boy, was it cold!"

Down the hall is one of the two bathrooms that serve the people who live in 30 rooms along this hallway. There's never any hot water, and the toilet regularly backs up and the landlord takes a week to fix it.

Henry's garbage is full of empty soup cans. He says he eats soup, corned beef hash, spaghetti. He used to drink coffee once or twice a week at a nearby restaurant, but no more. It just costs too much. Does he ever go hungry at the end of the month? "Yes, sometimes," he answers but says no more about it.

He shops for his own groceries, walking the streets in fear. One Sunday morning about a year ago two teenage boys knocked him down, broke his glasses and stole his wallet. He lost \$25—all the money he had for the rest of that month. "And people drove by in cars, saw it all and did nothing!" The police talked to him, but they too did nothing.

Now he goes out only at busy times of the day. "Kids today, they run the streets. It was different when I was a kid; then you tipped your hat, you showed some respect. If you didn't, you'd get a beating."

Henry's chief worry is the row of medicine bottles on the sink. They are for arthritis and heart trouble, and they are almost empty. He was supposed to go back to the clinic for more last week, but he had no money for busfare. A neighbor says he will go to the clinic and pick up the medicine. But will they give it to him? He wonders. "They get mad if you don't come back just when they say to, you know."

"I worked all my life, and this is all I have," he says, his hand gesturing at the peeling paint on the walls, the six-inch hole in the floor, the bugs. His wife died 15 years ago. They had no children. A nephew used to come and see him, but he has disappeared. Henry's voice grows angry when he speaks of his nephew.

He's angry that old people like himself aren't better cared for, but like many Americans, he mainly blames himself. His situation makes him doubt even his right to hold opinions.

What should be done to make things better, I ask.

"Why do you ask me? I'm old, just waiting to die. You know more than me."

—Judy MacLean



Jane Melnick

## STELLA

In 1972, Stella Francis, a retired R.N., sat amid her senior citizens group, listening to Maggie Kuhn of the Gray Panthers. Francis had never been an activist before, "but you never know when you'll become inspired to get off your rocker. I found it was a hidden thing I'd been wanting to do all my life."

Soon she found herself going across town to meetings in all kinds of weather. "We started on food stamps, and were able to get them for quite a few people who weren't receiving them, but were eligible," she recalls. "Then we went on to get more senior citizen housing."

They were winning that too, but Francis discovered that "It wasn't what I wanted. They offered me a beautiful place, and I refused to move there. That's what a Panther is about—we should be with people of all ages."

Today, at age 72, Stella Francis works five days a week as the Chicago Gray Panthers' only staffperson. As we sit in the tiny downtown office, our talk is interrupted by phone calls. People want literature, information. The weekly radio show must be planned. A member stops by with a copy of a legislation to prepare Francis for a confrontation with Sen. Charles Percy later in the week.

She loves her work. She showed up last winter in the worst snow storm of the Big Freeze. "Retirement can kill you. I know a man, he retired Dec. 31 and Died Jan. 2. All of a sudden, now, the government has discovered 65 isn't so bad. Now they want to make it 70. We say, if

you're qualified, you should stay on the job as long as you want."

A chance to keep on contributing through work is one way senior citizens can stay alive, healthy and happy. But there is another important factor. Love.

"I have nieces and nephews, they all stop by or call, sometimes only to say, 'Hello, old lady, just want to see how you're doing.' When they call me 'old lady' it's not with disrespect—it's done with love," she says.

Although she never married, she lives amid an extended family, with nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grand-nephews, even great-grand-nieces and nephews. She describes their love as a blanket wrapping her, keeping her warm. She speaks of a life knit together by thousands of tiny events: helping toddlers to take first steps; the same child stopping by a few years later for an after-school cookie or staying for a summer when Francis wasn't working. High school graduations. Marriages, or, "Just as likely today, moving-in-together."

"You have to have children around. We need to surround ourselves with love. If we did that, we wouldn't all be sick."

Senior citizens lose so much, shut off away from the young, she says. But the young lose out, too. She remembers the older people from her own childhood, many different adults she could turn to.

With so many children of working parents who aren't getting enough care, she asks, why doesn't society use the large group of older people who could help? "Hire someone my age to

be with them. Let us pour our love over the babies."

After old age, inevitably, comes death. But love and work can change the meaning of death. Francis remembers the death of her sister-in-law, with whom she had lived for many years. She had a stroke, but "we brought her right home. If she'd been around a lot of other people with strokes, she'd have given in to it. But she was around all her children and grandchildren. She regained the use of her arm and leg. We said, whatever happens, it will happen together. She visited all her brothers and sisters, and one day she sat down, and peacefully closed her eyes, with no fear—and died."

Now, the family goes on. Stella Francis has become the senior "old lady." When she's gone, there will be another. She'd like to see the Gray Panthers fight to reintegrate old and young, to knit us all into new, loving patterns. "It's the only thing that will save this country," she says.

She's fighting with the Panthers against forced retirement of people over 65 at Carson, Pirie Scott department store. "It occurred to us that Santa Claus is over 65. So we all dressed up like Santa and said, fire him first. Now people who work there have a choice about retirement."

She pickets the American Medical Association's convention. ("They just charge too much.") She marches against nuclear weapons in the rain. And she lives with the children. "They are the future. And who would dare live without our future?" she asks.

—Judy MacLean

hics in its place... We must make room for all of these values. For only on that



*law and custom, but it was wounded in the heart."* —David Hackett Fischer



Paul Sequiera

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

**The Coming of Age**, by Simone de Beauvoir, paperback, Warner Library, 1973.

This is a—if not *the*—basic text on aging. Dense reading, but solidly informative, it asks such questions as: when is a person old? can aging—biological and/or psychological—be postponed? can society be restructured to salvage the skills of the old for their own sake and to society's advantage? Conditions of the aged are examined in three kinds of society: "historical," "present-day" and "socialist." Although Beauvoir presents no easy solutions, she does note that "the class struggle governs the manner in which old age takes hold of a man," and points a hopeful direction for the future.

**Why Survive?—Being Old in America**, by Robert Butler, MD, Harper & Row, 1975, now in paperback \$5.95.

A Pulitzer Prize winning overview of the problem by the doctor/psychiatrist who coined the term "ageism." It is interesting, persuasive and authoritative on most of the crucial issues: e.g. housing, medical problems and the cost of care, violence directed against the aged, political action by and for the aged, suggestions for psychological as well as physical self-help.

Those who want to take action will find a long provocative "Agenda for Action" covering everything from consciousness-raising to "resistance" and "surveillance activity," followed by a discussion of 14 goals that Butler suggests be made part of a "national policy on aging."

**You and Your Aging Parent, The Modern Family's Guide to Emotional, Physical, and Financial**

## You Your and Aging Parent

BARBARA SILVERSTONE &  
HELEN KANDEL HYMAN

**Problems**, by Barbara Silverstone and Helen Kandel Hyman, Pantheon, 1976, \$10.

A useful reference work for those who have and/or an aging parent. It deals with feelings on the part of both sides of the generation gap that are difficult to handle and therefore dangerous. It attempts to guide the reader to a realistic assessment of the loss of independence on the part of the aged and the solutions that are appropriate at different stages of the continuum. There is a good chapter on the emotional problems of death and grief. The unusual strength of the book lies in the amount of up-to-date, practical information it offers on such matters as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, available community and private services, how to go about helping or getting help for the old ones who can still "manage independently" and for those who no

longer can. The appendices include directories of services and an abbreviated but informative checklist of common diseases of the elderly and their symptoms.

**Growing Old in America**, by David Hackett Fischer, Oxford Univ. Press, N.Y., 1977, \$10.95. David H. Fischer is a professor at Brandeis University, which has an unusually strong department of gerontology, and his book makes a contribution to scholarship and theory on the subject that reflects that collective concern. He reviews the history of the position of societal attitudes toward the old from the colonial beginnings of the U.S. to the present. His conclusion is that we must find "a better system that offers more dignity and prosperity to the old without imposing an increasingly heavy and regressive burden on the young."

**Old People/New Lives—Community Creation in a Retirement Residence**, by Jennie-Keith Ross, U. of Chicago Press, 1977, \$13.50. This grossly overpriced little book is one of those rare dissertations that attract and hold the non-academic reader despite the shackles of the form. Jennie-Keith Ross spent a year among a group of elderly French workers in a facility set up by their trade union (with a sprinkling of non-members from the village in which the residence is located).

She was interested in observing the formation of "community," starting from scratch, and she chronicles the process not only in statistical, but in engrossingly personal terms. Her findings argue for the "peer group community" as against a place in the extended family, and comparisons with other peer communities of different class composition and in different countries reinforce this conclusion.

Interestingly, the community forms by dividing the group into two antagonistic camps, based upon political divisions that had reality in the pasts of these people, but only symbolic importance in the present. The few residents who fail to integrate into the community are those that fail to take sides.

**Call It Zest**, by Elizabeth Yates, Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, Vt., 1977, \$7.95.

The subjects of these interviews are men and women—all past 70—who are living rich, meaningful lives. They have much in common, perhaps the most important being middle-class backgrounds which have prepared them to pick or pick up careers that can't be terminated by mandatory retirement ukases. All are religious in

some way or another. All are financially fairly secure. And all are interested in food—which may bear out Adelle Davis' belief that participation and nutrition are the twin keys to vigor in old age.

Included are doctors (one of whom becomes a clown, entertaining sick children when he retires), writers, ministers, an orchardist, a painter, a banker, an engineer, a restaurant owner and cook and a former saleswoman. What they prove is that given advantages—including the best of educations—old people not only enjoy their "golden years," but contribute to the commonweal.

**Too Old, Too Sick, Too Bad**, by Frank Moss and Val Halamandaris, Aspen Systems, Germantown, Md.

This book by a former U.S. Senator (who is the author of most of the nursing home legislation presently on the statute books) and the associate counsel of the Senate's Committee on Aging, is to be published later this summer. Highly recommended by Jack Anderson, it deals with conditions in nursing homes and abuses of the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

**Nursing Homes**, by Linda Horn and Elma Griesel, introduction by Maggie Kuhn, Beacon Press, 1977, paperback \$2.95 (Reviewed in *IN THESE TIMES*, Aug. 1.)

**Prime Time**

A bi-monthly periodical "by and for older women" which runs unusually interesting and thoughtful articles, letters and news of the anti-ageism movement plus radical perspectives on feminism. Sub. \$7, single copies 75¢. 420 W. 46th St., New York, NY, 10036

*broad basis can a just and free society be built."* —David Hackett Fischer