AS TIME GOES BY

THOUGHTS ON WELL-BEING IN LATER YEARS

COLLECTED AND WRITTEN BY
A GROUP OF OLDER PEOPLE
IN BRIGHTON & HOVE
FOR THEIR PEERS EVERYWHERE

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INTRO rg/TNOvie8(TIONETEM

Why do we need another guide to well-being in old age?

This one is di□erent in that the research and □ndings have been carried out by older people themselves, all the contributors being in their 70s and 80s.

It started as a joint research project in to well-being in old age between the University of Brighton and Age Concern Brighton, Hove and Portslade, taking over two years, and resulting in an academic report. But the information from the interviews (all done by the older people themselves) seemed too important not to be more widely known, and this is the result.

All the subjects and suggestions are based on these interviews and the experiences of the interviewers themselves. It was done at a local level in Brighton and Hove, though most of the □ndings are applicable nationally.

It was found that certain themes came up time and again, such as the importance of family and friends; the availability of public transport; housing, health and □nance. Some of the elderly interviewees were eager to learn about new technology, in particular systems that helped them to keep in touch with family far away, and access to internet information. Others were more concerned with immediate problems such as getting practical advice and help locally.

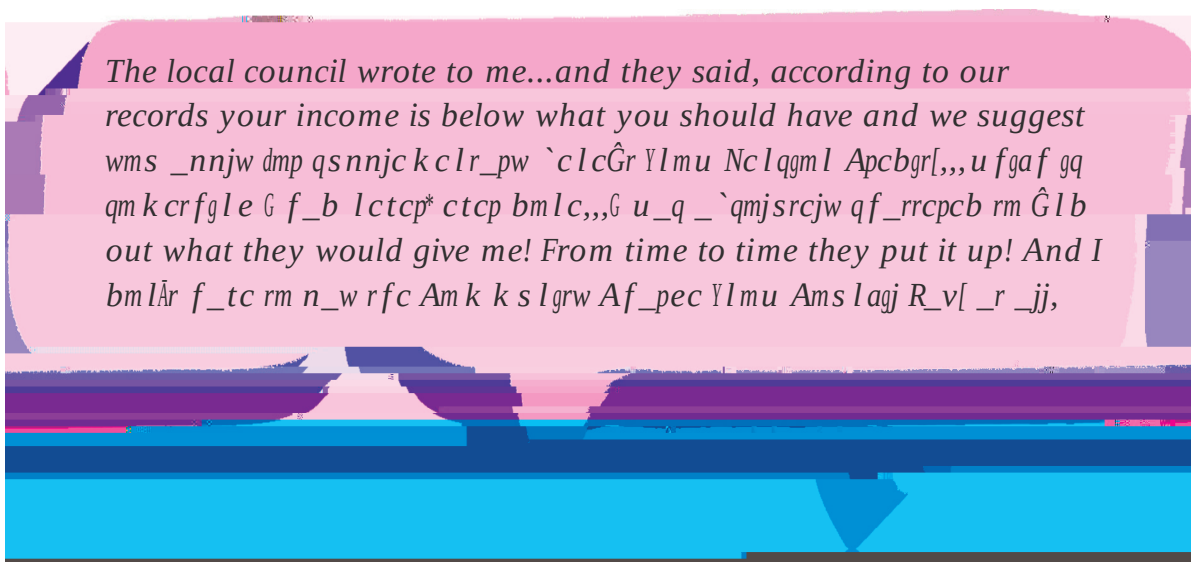
Some were feeling quite low, others enjoying life as fully as possible and, as all were talking to their contemporaries in the interviews, they were quite open in their comments and talking about their worries and how they tried to solve them.

We have tried to gather the main points raised with suggestions of possible solutions, remembering that it was older people themselves who provided the material. The sections in italics are direct quotes from the older people who were interviewed.

Our Finances

Taking Control Of Finances

As we get older however, many of us do worry about not having enough money - announcements in the press can cause worry even if they never come to fruition. Those of us on very low incomes may be entitled to statutory bene□ts. These are an entitlement and no-one should be reluctant to apply.



There are a number of agencies and services available - it's best to start with the ones you know and trust – which can help us establish if there are bene□ts to which we have become eligible, such as housing bene□t, the winter fuel allowance to help with rising fuel prices or attendance allowance when we need help with personal care. Getting help and advice about money management can reassure us, when we have limited means, that we can □nd a way of meeting our □nancial commitments.

Financial Security

Increasingly we are being expected to pay for things by card or other electronic means. Payments over the phone or on the internet can cause worry and it is advisable to check that we are dealing with a recognised company. Our personal details are unique to us, and we must be careful to whom we give them. We must not be afraid to question a caller and ask for proper identification of anyone asking for personal information. If we are unhappy about the credentials of someone on the phone, we should take their name and phone number and the name of the organisation they claim to represent. We can then call back if we wish to proceed having carefully considered the situation and possibly discussed it with someone else.

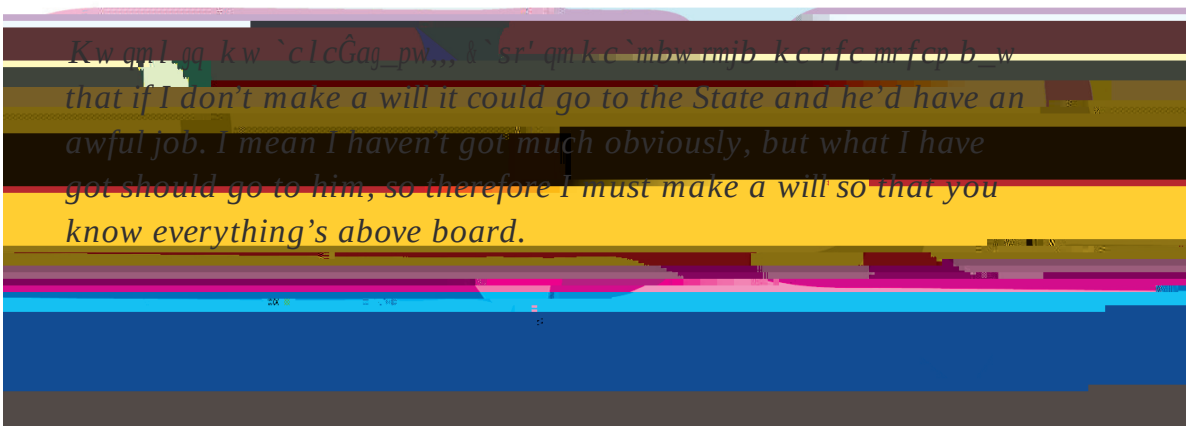
The internet can be a very useful way to shop but we must ensure that we use a secure site. These sites have a prefix **://'** and a padlock appears in the browser window. Another good tip is to keep one credit card just for internet shopping and to have a really safe password that someone would be unlikely to guess. It all seems very complicated but if we are unsure it is advisable to seek advice before becoming involved in internet shopping.

Age UK charities across the country provide Information and Advice services for anyone over 50 and will be able to provide advice on financial security.

Getting Your Affairs In Order

Some of us refuse to discuss the possibility of death and reject the idea that at some time we won't be around; others plan their funeral down to the last Amen. But whichever camp you are in it is important to make some provision - for the sake of your family or whoever will have to cope with your a□airs.

First, do make a Will. You will not die any quicker if you do so, and even if you feel that you have little to leave there is always something. If you don't say what you want done with it, it may go on the tip or to the Government.



It really does save a lot of hassle and argument if a Will is made and kept up to date. This can easily be done, with a solicitor if you have one, or organisations such as Age UK have free will-making services. It is important to make sure that your Will is properly drawn up, witnessed and signed. Your Will should then be lodged with someone close to you that you trust or with a solicitor.

'My aunt she died a month ago
And left me all her riches
A feather bed, a wooden leg
And a pair of calico britches!'

Old nursery rhyme.

Another major help is to give someone Lasting Power of Attorney.

This is a legal document appointing someone to act for you if you are unable to do things for yourself, or look after your a□airs. You can choose anyone: a family member; a close friend or solicitor; preferably someone younger than yourself, who you trust to act in your best interests. Unfortunately, there is a charge for registering this document but it can be downloaded from the internet. You may need a friend or

Keeping Up With New Developments

Our son lives in the States and...we do communicate with him by Skype on the computer and he speaks to us on that and we see him and speak with him and his family that way... it does help that you can see them.

The world around us is changing so quickly and it is understandable to feel more comfortable with methods of doing things which have become familiar over the years. It is, however, vital to be aware of what is changing, to assess how these changes may impact on our lives and, if necessary, to take appropriate steps to familiarise ourselves with new gadgets and methods of working.

Methods of communication are changing rapidly. No longer do grandchildren send an endearing thank you note but are more likely instead to send a text message – that is if we have mobile phones and have learned to 'text'! Forms that have to be completed for all sorts of things increasingly have to be done 'on-line'. If we haven't learned how to use a computer and do not have access to one, we become dependent on others to this for us. Also, as we become less able it could be a blessing to be able to order our shopping on-line and have it delivered to the front door. Many organisations including Age UK Brighton & Hove o□er free training in the use of the internet. If you do not have a computer of your own, many libraries have them available for you to use for your own purposes.

E-mail is just wonderful, and if there was one thing that was taken away from me that I would miss most, probably it would be my e-mail... I can be in touch with people all over the world'.

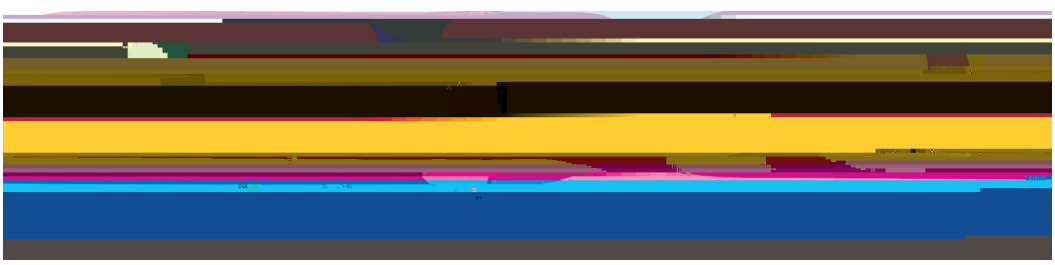
Our physical and mental health change as we get older but there is a lot we can do to slow down the process. We are bombarded with health advice on eating, drinking and exercise. Take on board what is sensible for you without impinging on your enjoyment of life.

Healthy eating is important: if you □nd cooking di□cult or a bore consider the luncheon club in your area. There are many companies that deliver meals which can be both tasty and nutritious.

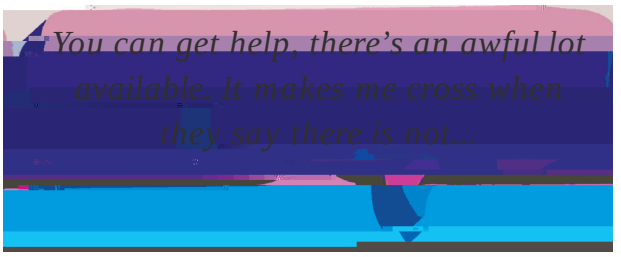
Physical exercise is good for you and can also be a source of enjoyment. There are many clubs for the older person to join which organise walks, swimming or dancing; they take into account your personal level of □tness and current abilities.

A short walk every day will help to keep you mobile; arranging to do this with a friend can provide both social contact and motivation. Some of us are unable to achieve this but it is possible to perform some exercises whilst sitting in a chair.

Keeping mentally active has been proven to be important for general well-being. Exercising your brain can be enjoyable, be it doing crossword puzzles, Sudoku or by going to book clubs, playing cards or attending educational classes. There is something out there for everyone.



Coping With Disabilities



We are all likely to suffer some of the problems that age can bring - some more difficult to manage than others.

Don't be afraid to ask for help when needed.

This is not being weak but being realistic by accepting both our own abilities and needs, and usually people are very ready to help.

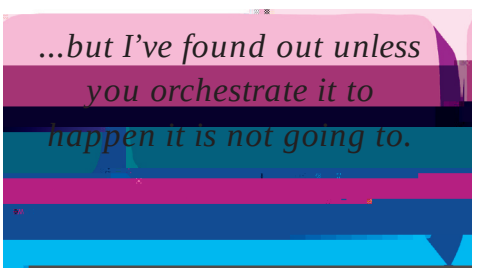
We can talk to family, friends and advisers and it is often true that'a problem shared is a problem halved'. We may well find that others have similar troubles, and it can often be helpful to share and compare how we cope. It is often a comfort to know that we are not alone. There are also professionals and advisers who can signpost you to sources of help.

Mobility Problems

If stairs, bathing and so on are becoming increasingly difficult there is help available in getting adaptations to your home; even such small things as handrails or lever latches instead of door knobs can make life easier and help keep independence both inside and out of home. Get in touch with the Adult Social Services at the Council for advice and information, or Age UK Brighton & Hove. There are also voluntary organisations that can help with, for instance, someone to come to visit or escort you out on a walk.

If you have pets and are worries about their care, or you have to go into hospital for a while, there are organisations such as the Cinnamon Trust, or 'borrowmydoggy.com', that can help.

There is also specialist help for particular ailments. The Parkinson Society or the Osteoporosis Society for instance, most of which have local support groups.



Hearing Problems

It seems odd that we seem to treat loss of hearing so differently from loss of sight. We accept the wearing of spectacles - and indeed make them a fashion statement – while resisting the hearing aid, though in many ways loss of hearing can affect us even more than loss of sight.

Communication difficulties can be frustrating when we try to take part in discussions or family gossip, and can lead to a feeling of isolation, or even suspicion that we are being deliberately excluded. But hearing aids really can help and they have improved very much. Many people are put off by the very high cost of some of the aids, but it is worth looking at the options available, and the free NHS ones are very good now. It is important to get your hearing checked as it might be useful to have an aid before it is actually necessary in order to get used to it by the time it is really needed.

Hearing aids may not be high fashion, but they can make a huge difference to our independence, inclusion in conversations and general well being.

Loss of Sight

If you notice even the slightest change in your eye sight get it checked as soon as possible. If there is nothing wrong you will be reassured or, if there is something amiss early diagnosis is all important.

The most common eye problems in older people are Glaucoma, Macular Degeneration (AMD) and Cataract. A Cataract can very often be successfully treated by an operation, but the other two present more problems which is why early diagnosis is so important.

Your optician may refer you to the Eye Hospital and the Liaison Officer there can give information and help in referring you to other organisations, such as the Low Vision

Becoming Forgetful

Throughout our lives we can and do forget things, especially when we are stressed and have a lot on our minds. When we are younger this is a minor irritation or can be a source of amusement. But as we become older and more forgetful it could be more serious. 'Am I getting Alzheimer's? Is this the beginning of dementia?'

So many of us have had these worries but so often we keep them to ourselves. Somehow a problem relating to our brain may seem less acceptable than a physical illness and we are reluctant to discuss it with anyone lest they agree with our fears.

Most of us lose our keys at some time or another but when we find them we are relieved and get on with our lives. It is only when we find the keys but do not know what to do with them that we may have something to worry about. This, of course, is a gross over-simplification but can be reassuring when once again we cannot find something or cannot remember the name of a book we read only last week!

If we begin seriously to fear that this is more than normal forgetfulness, it is important that we discuss it with someone we trust rather than worrying alone. The Alzheimer's Association can give valuable advice at this stage. At the same time it is essential to visit the GP to discuss the symptoms that are concerning us. The GP may be reassuring or may make a referral to a consultant who can do some tests. Research is going on all the time and medication is being developed that can help delay the symptoms of dementia. As with most illnesses, the earlier we get a diagnosis the greater chance we have of receiving appropriate treatment and support.

Nutrition

When we get older, particularly when we are living alone, its only too easy to snack and reach for a biscuit or piece of cake instead of having a proper meal. However, its really important to our health to maintain a healthy body weight and our strength and resilience is always supported by a good diet. If we are taking medicines, unless we have been advised that particular nutrition and diet is required, in general a healthy diet will help us to process our medication.

Ready prepared food is available from supermarkets or companies who will deliver to you (usually in one weeks supply or more so freezer space is important).

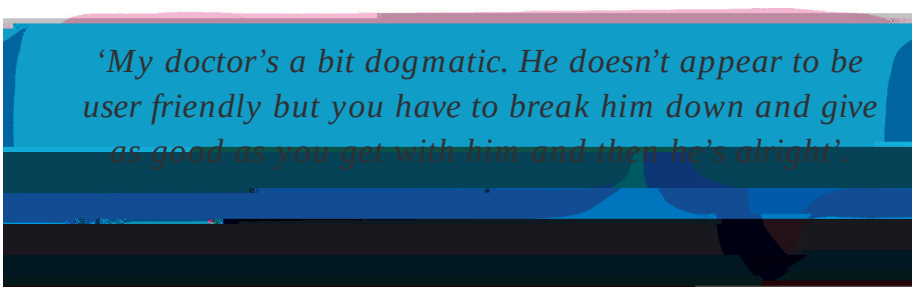
Many meal recipies are usually designed for 4 people unless otherwise stated, so you can continue to do this having one portion and devising the rest into portions that can be frozen and eaten later. Fresh and whole foods are b the173[m,t65 ∋D2oup foods that

Seeking medical help

Our experience with the medical profession can vary a great deal. Some of us are content with the services o□ered by our GP practice but others are not so fortunate.

The □rst hurdle can be making an appointment; it is as well to establish the procedure followed by your own particular surgery. However, in the case of an emergency, we should not hesitate to call an ambulance. The problem will be dealt with sympathetically and e□ciently.

Many of us feel comfortable about going to the GP when we are unwell with a virus vP5(her)-4(imacst scan fe a bood t037nrt opr)-24(taof c)ll aor a y ouesiss ue cay eave oith ye grds infection or ongoing medical condition but we often hesitate when other problems arise. 'Perhaps it is just my age', or 'I am making a fuss', or 'I don't want to be a burden', can cross our minds. We should, of course, make that appointment and, at best, ease our concerns.



It is good to prepare for a medical appointment by making a list of symptoms in advance as often, afterwards, we realise that we have omitted to tell the practitioner something signi□cant.

It can also be useful to take someone with you. When we are unwell we can feel vulnerable and insecure and may even □nd ourselves unable to question or 33.61tn

Many GP surgeries now o□er telephone consultations, which can save a di□cult trip to

Our Home

Sometimes we feel a bit vulnerable about going out and it can be helpful to plan ahead - for example work out the route and where you can stop for a rest. If possible

Remember, we do not have to let anyone into our homes without prior arrangement, especially if we don't feel con□dent about who they are. If someone calls and wants to come in for any reason and we are not happy about it we can suggest that they make an appointment at a time when someone else can be there.

How many of us use our door chains on a regular basis? It can seem silly to put the chain on before answering the door. But unless you are sure who is there it is silly not to use it because the person outside could be seeking entry for a bad reason. We should also use the chain while checking the credentials of legitimate callers such a meter readers. And ALWAYS check their identity if you don't know them. Genuine callers won't mind – it is only the cowboys who may object, and you don't want them anyway. However, once the caller has left, it is very important to release the chain. In the unfortunate event of you having an accident and someone needing to get in to help you, the chain could delay their entry. So, normally,chain o□, but when an unexpected caller comes – chain on!

A new initiative by Brighton Lions is a *'Message in a Bottle'.* This is a distinctive plastic pot which you keep in your fridge (in case of □re). Inside you enter important medical information about yourself and details of next of kin. On the fridge door you display the sticker provided which would alert the emergency services, should they need to help you, that the 'bottle' is inside the fridge. These 'bottles' can be obtained from Age UK Brighton and Hove or from local chemists. They may be available in other parts of the UK.

Getting to know your neighbours

We should all try to get to know our neighbours. We do not have to sit in each others pockets, but it is good to be at least on nodding terms. We should not be afraid to knock on their door and introduce ourselves - they may have been meaning to do

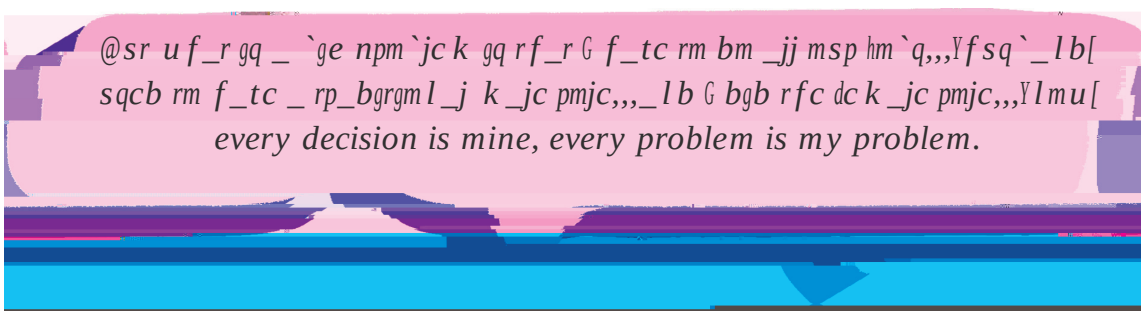
Ourselves

Thinking ahead

Many of us have someone who is highly signi□cant in our lives – a spouse, a partner or a close friend. Often we live together but, sadly, the reality is that one of us is almost certain to be left alone when the other dies, or one of us may become severely incapacitated and be unable to ful□l the role that they did when we were both □t and well. Hard though it may be, it is important to begin thinking now about how each of us would cope if we had to do all that we share at present.

Many of us have shared the roles between us. One may take all responsibility for shopping and food preparation, the other may be responsible for tasks related to household maintenance. One may take a major role in dealing with □nance issues and the other may take the lead in organising social activities. It is very important that we begin to discuss these matters to ensure that each of us has enough knowledge and skill to take over these responsibilities if the other is not able to do this.

Some couples do everything together, such as shopping, visiting friends, taking trips and going on holiday. This is a very important part of our relationship, but how would we manage if we had to do these things alone?



Maybe we should consider doing some of these things separately sometimes. Perhaps each could pursue a separate interest outside the home, leaving the other to spend some time at home alone? This would give us the opportunity to see how we would spend time if our partner was not there. We might even consider taking a short holiday separately. This may be a □rst but is worth a try to see how we would manage alone. It would probably be easier if the holiday involved other people with a common interest.

Losing loved ones

Relationships with family are often the longest of our lives but friendships can also be long lasting. As we get older those long relationships are an important source of shared experiences and shared history. This makes it especially hard when we lose someone we have known a long time because of the loss of a shared life and of continuity. We may feel there is no one that can remember the things we went through together or understand the past experiences in the way that the lost loved one did. This can make it hard to relate to others.

Although this won't bring them back memories, letters and photographs can help us to recall and savour the good things.

It's also important to remember that losses can lead to new and unexpected relationships emerging. Perhaps we can now meet up with estranged siblings, or younger relatives we never got to know or to renew connections with family or friends. It is important to try to be alert to the opportunities that change can bring to relationships despite the pain and the loss that we may be feeling. Remember it's never too late to form new relationships or rekindle old ones.

Making new friends and keeping up with old ones

Meeting new people can feel a bit daunting or di□cult but □nding someone who has a shared interest can be a good way to form a lasting bond. Joining groups and □nding acceptance from others can give a real boost to our sense of well being.

You may want to take up an activity that you enjoyed when younger or you may now have the chance to develop a new interest. There are many organisations which run meetings and events for those with special interests, for example birdwatching outings and talks about birds with the RSPB. There are others such as University of the Third Age (U3A) and Lifelines which run classes catering for many varied interests. Public libraries are a good source of information about activities available locally. Age UK has lists of day centres and lunch clubs. Brighton Council runs health walks in various parts of the city.

Those Christmas cards you have exchanged over many years with old friends with just a few words of news, may now prove to be the source of renewed 0 12.6121 l[ar)s5. Brdi2h /Span /Lang

With life's ups and downs we can easily all lose con□dence and this can make it di□cult to form new friendships. For example being ill makes it di□cult as one can't get out and meet people and the world can seem to close in on us.

We might feel its best not to ask people because it can feel embarrassing if there is a rejection or refusal of our e□orts. But we don't know if we don't try and the person we feel afraid of talking to might feel the same way about us. We often forget that others may have worries or problems of their own and breaking down barriers and o□ering our own strengths will contribute to our sense of well being - it is something that all human beings can be good at!

Even casual social contact can really brighten the day - for example a chat at the shops. You would be surprised how many people forget that sta□ at checkouts, whatever their age, can feel neglected, unnoticed and low too. You could brighten their day with a brief chat, a smile or kind word in a way that will make you feel better as well.

Relationships with family

Our relationships with our children are some of the most important relationships we have. Whether they are positive and straightforward or complex and di□cult, they are bound to have an impact on how we feel. Generally speaking a close family contributes strongly to a feeling of well being and rifts tend to cause great sadness, but these things are not of course entirely in our control. It is easy to assume if you have di□cult family relationships that you are alone but that is not necessarily so as many family relationships are notoriously complicated!

In relationships between parents and children adjustments are needed on both sides as our children grow up and we grow older. These kinds of adjustments are not things we normally plan or prepare for they just start to happen and we have to □nd ways to adjust. Things we may have done or provided for our children in the past can become di□cult and we may have to change and our relationships and roles. We may need their help with things we would prefer to be able to do ourselves. On the other hand we may be able to o□er caring, wisdom and support to them in new ways too.

It is natural and normal to want to see children more frequently as our lives become less busy - but it is important to remember that this is often at a time when our children's lives are at their busiest. This applies to those living quite close and having frequent contact as well as to those with families far away whom they see infrequently.

In the time we spend together it is the quality of attention we can give each other that can make a real di□erence - and of course this works both ways! Maintaining a satisfactory relationship requires sensitivity, diplomacy and careful handling and this is especially true when grandchildren are involved. Of course, we all know that a particular hazard to avoid is that of criticising the way our children bring up our grandchildren!

I don't interfere with their lives so I try to be supportive but I don't tell them what to do, what not to do. I might not agree with a lot of the things they might do but I keep my mouth closed.

Grandchildren, however, can bring great pleasure and fun and there can be immense satisfaction in watching another generation progress towards adulthood. Young life also keeps us fresh and up to date with the present world.

The world is a di□erent place to when we were young and parents have many concerns to juggle that did not apply when we were parents. They do their best – if we think they are making mistakes we must think very hard before saying so. For, unless they have asked for advice, it is unlikely they will welcome our 'suggestions'!

We should not, of course, hold back if we have serious concerns over the welfare of our grandchildren.

Of course there have been big changes in family relationships over the last 50 years or so and many families are widely spread. Generally speaking there were greater expectations on families to care for one another in the past than there are now. Many people also travel much greater distances to work and have less time available to for each other. People are no longer expected to look after family/parents. Families are much more widely dispersed and live far from one another. Using the telephone can be a good way to keep in contact or perhaps we should try more modern forms of technology such as texting, e-mail or Skype.

Giving and receiving care

As we become more frail and perhaps less able to do everything that we used to, it is inevitable that we will have to rely on help from other people to some extent. Most of this help will be informal and will come from family, friends and neighbours. It is only when we have the very greatest needs that health and social care professionals will become involved in our everyday lives.

Giving or receiving care of any kind creates a relationship. At its best this can be both supportive and rewarding but if it doesn't work it can be very negative. Any relationship is a two way response and there are three strands that make up the important ingredients: reliability, reassurance and respect. However grateful we are, the caring relationship puts a great strain on both sides. There will be times when tempers flare with carers feeling unappreciated and those being cared for feeling frustrated by their inability to do things for themselves.

But how do we conduct ourselves so that the help often offered very willingly, at least at first, does not become a burden? If we need help, we must be realistic and accept that contact with any helper may be less than we would like. We must avoid criticising and, for example, accept that when a substitute has to be made for something on the shopping list, much thought probably went into the alternative even if it is not something we would have chosen! We must remember too that friends and neighbours are also ageing and may no longer be able to give the help they did in the past. When this happens, we must be prepared to accept alternatives, possibly provided by professionals.

Remember, if things are not going well, there are many advice services available which can help. You do not need to suffer in silence – it's better to speak to someone in confidence who is independent and can listen to your concerns.

You may have a neighbour friend or relative helping you on an informal basis and this may work perfectly well. On the other hand if you are entitled to □nancial help with your care, using an 'individual budget' (money that social services allocate to you direct to pay for help) can formalise and set boundaries to a previously informal 'care' role. This can sometimes be helpful if things are not working quite right or you feel uneasy about the relationship.

Giving care can be very rewarding and satisfying but can also be di□cult and demanding. Being a carer can also make it very di□cult to maintain old relationships or form new ones. Being a carer is such an important and di□cult job and takes so much out of us that it is important to make sure we have support from other people and we must not be afraid to ask.

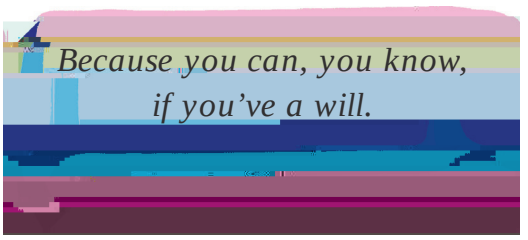
It can be really helpful to have a network of support to boost the spirits and help us to ful□l the caring role with renewed energy. Crossroads is one of a number of organisations able to give support to carers.

Recognise your own strengths

Retirement we are told is the beginning of a 'third age' a new page in the book of life. For some of us this can be a challenge but for others daunting. How we approach later life is a very individual thing, but we must not lose sight of what we have gained over the years. Throughout our lives we have learnt to cope, adapt and be resilient. Experience has given us many practical skills and emotional strengths which we may now need to use. It can be all too easy to focus on the things we can't do anymore. However, listing what we are able to do can be a surprise and prompt old interests that can be re-kindled or new ones to try.

Our practical skills can be used in a variety of ways be it developing pre-existing hobbies; trying something new or helping others. Often the process of supporting someone else can make us feel useful and, therefore, good about ourselves. At times, all of us can feel lonely or depressed. Over our lifetime we have acquired internal strengths and reserves, which we can now bring to the fore enabling us to cope and help overcome the problem.

There is no point dwelling on what we should or should not have done but live for today and the future. Growing old can't be learnt but accepting change and adapting to it can be. We now have time to re□ect on all the positive things gained over our lifetime that we can use to enhance our well-being today.



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Bunty Bateman, 81

Liz Ray, 86

Diana Owen, 88

Marion Couldery, 76

Joyce Laverpreddy, 88

Beatrice Gahagan
(apprentice older person!)

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The first edition held a list of useful organisations. For up to date information about all relevant organisations that can offer advice and support please contact Age UK Brighton & Hove's Information & Advice Service on 01273 720603.