

## ***Aging with an Attitude***

My daughter recently celebrated her 30th birthday. Many times in the weeks preceding her birthday she lamented the fact that she was getting old. I hope that her concern about getting old is not a result of any spoken or unspoken messages I have given her about aging.

As the mother of a 30 year old, I've been reflecting on what it means to be aging and why some women fret about how old they are while others celebrate it. My grandmother died at the age of 39. She had been 39 ever since I could remember. She explained away her grown daughter and granddaughter by saying she was a "child bride." By the age on her birth certificate, Gram was actually 94 when she died. Instead of being proud of living to such an age, she'd probably be just a little bit annoyed with me for telling you the truth.

As I think about my grandmother and her conflicted feelings about her age, I'm reminded of when I taught puberty classes for girls and their moms. At the beginning of the class I would ask each mom to introduce her daughter giving her name, age and sharing other facts about her. Then I'd ask the girl to introduce her mom giving us the same information. I could count on the moms and girls to giggle at the idea of announcing the mom's age to the group. It seemed that even girls whose moms were in their 30s had learned already that it was somewhat embarrassing to be "getting older."

Now I can't, in such a short essay, go into the social and cultural issues that have caused us to be so concerned about our age, but I can propose that we have a choice as to how we view our own aging. It's a fact that we are living longer. I'm nearing 59 years old as I write this. Women my age may very well have 30 more years of active life ahead of them. The very sound of the words 50, 60, or even 70 evoke mental pictures of the past when those ages were "old." But in the time we are living, they don't have to be.

Of course, health and financial issues have an impact on how we live at this time of life but attitude is of supreme importance. I recently had the opportunity to spend some time with a group of women who were mostly older than me. Aging had been on my mind and here was the perfect chance to learn how others experienced growing older.

I can only imagine the look on my grandmother's face had she heard me ask one woman present what it was like to be 80! Yet Ruth's answer was inspiring. She said that many people talk about being "over the hill" but she had found going down the hill much easier than going up! With a twinkle in her eye, Ruth shared with us her next ten-year plan.

Mary, in her late 70s, said she cherished life in a different way now. She'd become a more peaceful and accepting person. While Nancy, in her 60s, found herself too busy to think about getting older, she realized the importance of maintaining friends of all different ages.

Women friends seem to be particularly important as we age. If only for the fact that women live longer. Everyone acknowledged the loss of friends and loved ones at this time in life. Betty, at 60, found she thinks more about the end of life than in the past but that it seems less frightening.

Everyone talked about the freedoms of aging—the freedom to say things or do things you might not have felt comfortable with when you were younger. With fewer family responsibilities, you have the freedom to pursue interests, travel or even relax when and how you want. The women also talked about the responsibilities of aging. These women seemed to feel a responsibility to set an example and share their experiences with younger women.

The consistent message to me was that one's attitude was the deciding factor on how one viewed growing older. While I was lucky enough to have this conversation with women who definitely had an "attitude," what they showed me is that we all have this choice. None of these women had escaped life's challenges, yet each viewed aging as a gift full of possibilities.

These women aren't an isolated few. As I've traveled across the country speaking with women of all ages, I've had the privilege of spending time with many, many women who have this same attitude. They are a great example of how people can remain vital no matter how old or what their limitations are.

As I work on my attitude about growing older, I know that there will be things I won't appreciate. I'm only 59 yet when I get together with friends the conversation usually involves laments about failing eyesight, memory loss, and our various aches and pains. I do, however, have the choice to enjoy my new freedoms and privileges.

Besides my conversations with older women, I've found a few books that have addressed these issues and have been quite inspiring:

- [Red Hot Mamas](#) by Colette Dowling
- [Be an Outrageous Older Woman](#) by Ruth Harriet Jacobs
- [Fear of Fifty](#) by Erica Jong
- [Getting Over Getting Older](#) by Letty Cottin Pogrebin
- [Forever 50 and Other Negotiations](#) by Judith Viorst
- [Suddenly 60 and Other Shocks of Later Life](#) by Judith Viorst

You can learn more about these books and order them from Amazon.com by clicking on their titles above.

I wish Gram had lived in our times so she too could have an "attitude" about her aging. I'm hoping the mothers in those puberty classes will rethink the messages they are giving their daughters about aging. As for me, I plan to set an example for my daughter, step-daughters, and future granddaughters. I am aging with an **ATTITUDE** and I am getting older but I'm getting better every day! How about you?