

Young and old united in caring

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Over the years my best friend and longtime marriage partner has encountered some disabilities. Now, after 63 years of marriage, she requires a wheeled walker to be mobile enough to shop or carry out other daily tasks.

We are grateful when friends, as well as strangers too, treat us with courtesy and graciousness as we travel rather slowly from place to place. We are heartened when young people, some even at elementary school age, hold doors open for us or perform other simple but important tasks to assist us. These are tasks where we do not ask for help but for which we appreciate it very much when assistance is offered.

These expressions of help and kindness are important for their own sake. But even more important is the inner happiness we feel about the type of gracious society we enjoy within Canada.

As octogenarians we sometimes have different ideas from those of the young people we observe. When it comes to their musical tastes, their manner of dressing, their enthusiastic conversations among themselves, and their modernized technology used to communicate with each other, we feel that many parts of modern society have changed since we were young. We recognize that due to our contentment with living in the past we have been left behind by modern society to live within our own styles and choices and at our own slower pace. Many of us have not changed with the times. In some sense, as elderly people, we have made ourselves foreigners within our own country.

As older citizens, when we think about our present society we have come to recognize that numerous changes have occurred in the past sixty years. Many are changes or improvements when compared to life styles we experienced in our own youth.

Today we enjoy government health care, old age security pensions, expectations and benefits of university educations, easy and instant email service, and personal computers which offer access to information that goes far beyond the old sets of seldom-used encyclopedias we stored away somewhere on a remote cupboard shelf. We have instant coloured television and pictures and descriptions of world news events available within each hour of everyday.

Many of us seniors grew up in small towns or on country farms. We didn't see many ethnic groups different from our own nor did we hear language or see clothing styles or religious practices unlike those of our own communities. Our thoughts of travelling to other parts of the world in airplanes at speeds approaching 600 miles per hour were mostly just unrealized dreams. Years ago, exploration in space ships was not even thought of by most of us when we were children.

So for many of my generation, we have already had numerous changes to get used to. We tend to prefer to adjust slowly to things which will bring us into a more modern era. We want to move gradually and we want continued changes to come about at a slower pace so that we can more comfortably adjust to new life styles.

Whenever we observe small courtesies among people or expressions of etiquette or kindness we are, or at least we ought to be, grateful and happy. To most of us elder folks, when a young person holds a door open for us, we feel thankful. We feel appreciation for youth even though our youth today are different in many ways from ourselves. Yet they unite with us in simple but important courtesies. Their kindness and respect when they open doors for us or pick up an item we dropped on the floor or they rush out of a store to return an umbrella or a pair of forgotten gloves to us, we are filled with gratefulness. We are convinced our youth are good people who will turn out to be good Canadian citizens because they have important values of etiquette and kindness. They have shown us caring and courtesy. These two important values should help to carry them through to success in their lives. We owe it to them to be respectful of youth just as they have shown respect for their elders.