

# The Elderly ... What's Their Place in Modern Life?

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There are about 64,000 elderly persons in the Rochester area alone who need more of everything — more housing, more long term care facilities, more realization by the general public of the many aspects there can be to growing old.

We have long been a nation of youth-worshippers. Every place of life and activity places an over-emphasis on the energetic, on the absolute need to be forever beautiful and buoyant, virile and vigorous. Getting old, "on in years", is seen as the most dreaded stage of human development; it must be postponed as long as possible or totally denied.

The advances of medical science, increased attention by the individual to his health and well being have all resulted in one out of every ten Americans being over 65.

So, here we are, of the beautiful, no-cal, forever young generation rounding out the decade facing the problem of how to handle the thousands of aging among us.

Being over 65 in 1969 is greatly different from a generation ago. While today we have far larger numbers of people surviving into patriarchal years, there are far fewer family situations which allow the elderly person to remain with his married children. The old concept of the two or three generational household where maiden aunts and grandmothers were all part of one large family unit, cared for until death, has lost its meaning.

Small one family homes, larger families of children and economic considerations have all forced the elderly to survive elsewhere. Elsewhere means in small apartments, institutions, nursing homes, housing units especially for the elderly — and, poignantly, some in old family homes directly in the paths of the urban renewal steam shovels.

Today's elderly in these locations appear isolated and removed from modern life. They are now living on fixed retirement incomes, outside activities become more limited and the ever present fear about outliving one's financial assets is haunting and often demoralizing.

The aging process is a losing one — one loses his life employment, his friends and spouse. Physical strength lessens with an accompanying loss of interest in environment. In addition, today's many rapid and dramatic changes in social values and moral attitudes have seemed to alienate and to divide sharply the aging from the rest of the youth-oriented population.

Yet it is from these latter that an improvement and change in attitude must come.

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This is the first in a two-part series on the ever-growing problem confronting senior citizens like this elderly lady.

The articles will point out some of the problems older people must cope with and some of the possible solutions being tried to assure them a happy place in modern life.

So far, both through guilt and dismay our thinking for the elderly seems to go toward keeping them together, in specialized institutions, retirement villages, and other types of congregated arrangements.

The Saturday Review in a recent article entitled "Who Cares for the Aged?" takes great exception to such planning, "rehabilitation" of the aging. Care must be taken not to oversimplify the problem. There is absolutely no one solution but there are possible a number of solutions.

where residents sit in rocking chairs all day is fast disappearing. It is now an established precept that progress is possible with older people, that old age is not synonymous with immobility, that maybe you slow down but you don't have to stop.

Today's institution for the elderly is a dynamic and changing concept. Every effort is made to keep the resident involved with life, to arouse interests and develop talents. The fact to remember though, is that a lot of people just want to sit and rock. This is particularly true with today's elderly since the value of pastimes, hobbies, and avocations was not so much stressed years back

when these people were developing their life patterns. There are quite a number of elderly who are not seeking to be "rehabilitated" and who really want to be comfortable within their own age group. The Saturday Review feels we're only telling ourselves this because we are avoiding the real problem which the author sees as being the need to keep a person in his own home as long as possible.

Maybe. This is but one of many acceptable goals in caring for the aging. What has to evolve is to increase the number of possible facilities, which can help an elderly person.

We need places where old people can sit and rock yet we need also more small group boarding homes in contrast to the monolithic institutions now prevailing. A more complete gamut of home care services is also a part of the whole.

Much of the thinking about problems of the elderly tends to be in terms of what we have not done. This is a long term, complex problem which won't fit under one governmental umbrella. We have to think and plan, make mistakes and rethink. Life is precious for everyone regardless of age and long life must be made as rewarding as possible. (To be continued next week.)

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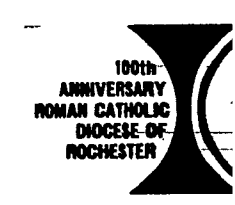
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