

## Act Your Age?

By Linda S. Thompson

A while back I was listening to the radio, when the host introduced a guest by saying he had known her for many years. He said that she was an 81 year old activist, and then went on to say, "She certainly doesn't act 81." That made me stop and think of the many pictures the listeners must be seeing in their minds about just what 81 looks and acts like.

Permit me to ask you this question. "What do you think 80 looks like?" If you are 20, eighty probably seems fairly old in years – at least your grandparents' age; perhaps even your great-grandparents. But at 20, you have grown up with an entirely different view of aging than those of us who are now 60. When your grandparents were 60, chances are they were still working. At 80, they've now retired, but may still travel, dance, and socialize with their peers.

My perspective of what a particular age looks and acts like changes as my own age increases. My Mother lived with me for the last 12 years of her life, and she passed at the age of 90. Until she was in her late 80s, this woman was very active in her community, able to keep up the house and loved working in her rose garden. Just prior to her passing, she had slowed down, but still spent some time every day on her exercycle, walked up and down the street to get some fresh air, and maintained a healthy diet. She took no prescription medications and never spent the night in a hospital.

Based on personal experience, 80 doesn't seem terribly old to me. Mom used to say as long as she was a contributing member of society, she had a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Once she could no longer say that, she was ready to go to the next stage of her journey. In other words, age is a state of mind.

Leroy "Satchel" Paige once asked, "How old would you be if you didn't know how old you are?" Just think about that for a minute. If you didn't know you were 65, would you even be considering retirement? If you didn't know you were 80, would you be worrying about "getting old?" What's wrong with turning that around and concentrate on "staying young?" I do believe that preconceived ideas can set the stage for how we feel, act, and talk at every stage of our lives. When you were 10, did your Mom ever say, "Act your age?" Did you ever ask her just what 10 was supposed to act like? You, after all, were just being you. Has anything changed?

It is my belief that we all need to put these perceptions of a particular age out of our minds. We are living longer and healthier, and have much more active lives than those of our elders and ancestors. Today it isn't unusual to have four, and perhaps even five, generations living under one roof. As little as fifty years ago, we would have been lucky to have three generations at the same time, and if we did, it didn't last long.

So the next time someone says to you, "Gee, you sure don't act like you are (whatever your age may be)." Or, "Wow, you don't look \_\_\_\_." Why not ask them, "Just what is \_\_ supposed to look like?" Categorizing people by a number no longer carries the meaning it used to, and it's time to change our way of thinking. If we don't, we may very well "look and act 80" well before our time.

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