

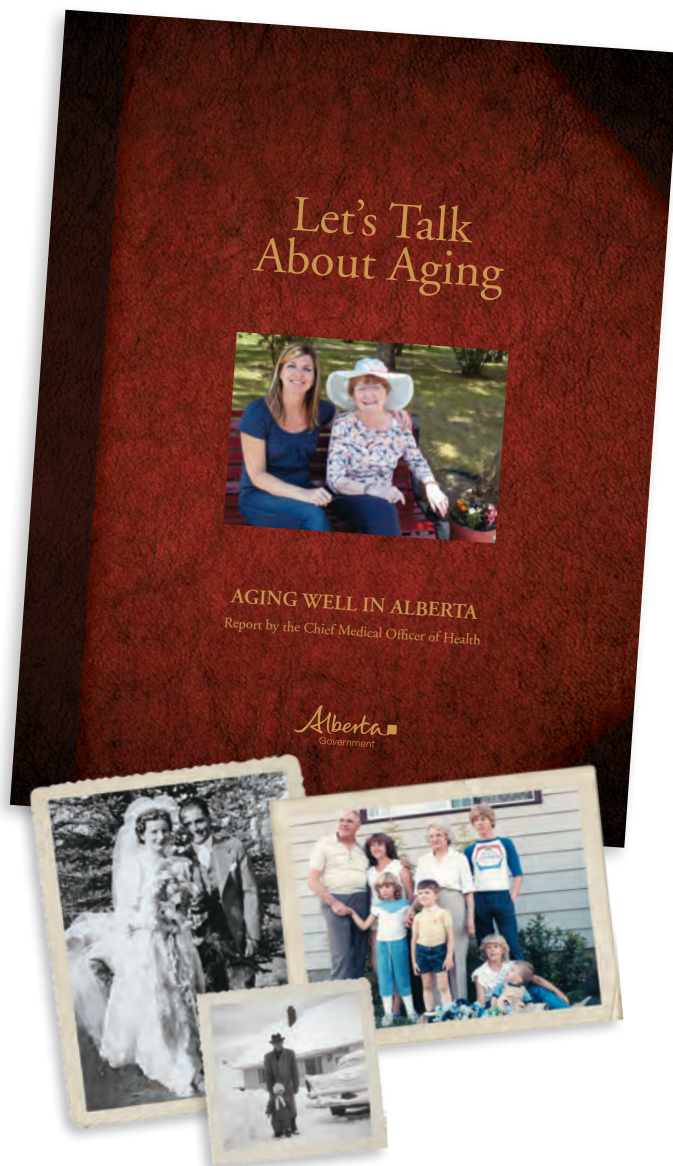
If I Knew Then What I Know Now

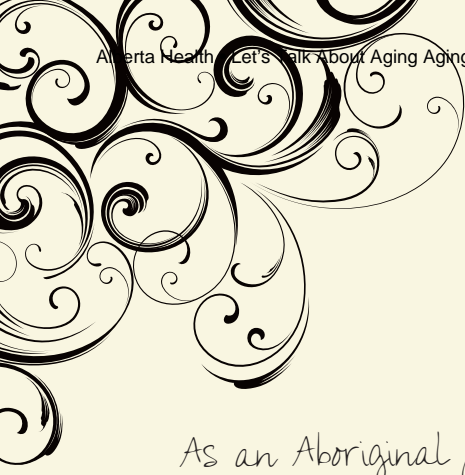
Personal Thoughts About Aging Well

Designed to look like an old family album, the *Let's Talk About Aging* report depicts aging as part of a life long journey, filled with memories of the past and the optimism of new experiences.

Within each of the chapters are pockets that contain notes, letters and postcards written by Albertans young and old, sharing their experiences and thoughts from their personal journey. We encourage you, the reader, to take a moment to reflect on how you feel about your own aging journey and what you can do to support the older adults you encounter in your life.

The notes, letters and postcards from each chapter pocket are provided as a PDF Appendix to the web posted version of the *Let's Talk About Aging* report.





As an Aboriginal person in Alberta, I thought I was used to seeing people who were disadvantaged. But on a recent trip to Zimbabwe with my husband, I realized that I had not truly experienced the impact years of disease and death can have on communities.

I thought I was prepared. I had done a lot of research on Zimbabwe. I knew that the average life expectancy was about 43 years of age. I knew that 20 per cent of children under the age of five years were still dying of HIV-AIDS. I also knew that 40 per cent of the population was under the age of 15 years. But to see and get to know those who were directly affected by these numbers was a different matter; to talk to pastors who continued to do 300 plus funerals per year; to see many "blended families" due to death of parents and siblings - all of this was very sobering.

For Aboriginal people, our elders are considered to be knowledge keepers, those who are wise, those who ensure that our culture and languages are preserved, and those whom we turn to in times of crisis and concern. To see communities without their elders was very sad for me. Not only was the country ravaged by disease and all the side effects that come with it, but there were very few older people left who could remind others about how it used to be - about a time when the country was healthier, families were strong, their home languages were spoken and their culture was celebrated.

I came home very thankful that I have the opportunity to age well. I have the privilege of growing old and the opportunity to spend time with my grandchildren. To dream with them, to make plans with them about their future, to enjoy them.

Carol



Aging well is taking care of myself now, by keeping a good diet, getting regular exercise, building good relationships with family, friends, neighbourhood, larger community and preparing financially for a comfortable future.

Stay well!
Tara

com·mu·ni·ty [kuh-myoo-ni-tee]

a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists (usually preceded by the): the business community; the community of scholars.



Miss Jane Smithson

Small Town, Alberta

R4S 2N9

(Getting older) surprises me almost daily - my lack of energy sometimes and often the way we're looked at by younger people. This winter we were visiting our son and his three children in Grande Prairie. The city plows the snow up into a big mountain in the cul de sac where they live. I was outside with my granddaughters as they were sliding on that mountain. This one little boy ended up in a puddle and got his mittens wet. His friend said to him, pointing at me, "Maybe that nice old lady will hold them for you." I'm kind of laughing at being called an old lady. And the boy came over and asked me. I agreed and then I said, "And how old do you think I am?" "Oh, about 100 or so." 100 or so?! OR 30??

And you wonder if they look upon us as having any value. I know in Africa (my daughter was in Africa for a long time) the elderly were really respected. But I don't think the younger people now look at us as having wisdom. I don't think they'll need us. And to a point they're right, we come from a different time, a different world. And I don't know if it bothers me, exactly, but you have more time for thinking now.

Madeline



Something I would like to do more as I grow older is volunteering, spending more time volunteering in the community. I'm kind of doing it now, I have a select number of charities I am involved with and I like to share my skills. A lot of the volunteer work I do, I am also learning new skills. And I have met some nice, interesting people along the way.

Marlene



Miss Jane Doe

Small Town, Alberta

THERE IS
NO TIME
MORE FITTING
TO SAY

Thank you

I HOPE THAT I CAN STAY WHERE I'M AT.
WHERE I'M AT, MEANS MY OWN HOME.
I LOVE IT HERE. BUT THE MINUTE I CAN'T
DRIVE, OR DRIVE SAFELY, I'M MOVING US
OUT OF HERE TO A PLACE LIKE WHERE
(MY WIFE'S) MOM JUST MOVED TO. A
PLACE WHERE YOU DON'T HAVE TO COOK
YOUR OWN MEALS, YOU KNOW. I MEAN, HER
MOM JUST DID NOT WANT TO MOVE. SHE
STAYED AND STAYED IN HER OWN PLACE AND
IT WAS HARD. WE'LL BE MOVING EARLIER.

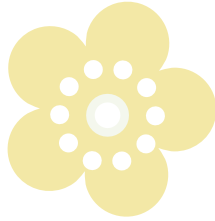
JOE



ANNETTE DUPESTON

9 CORONATION AVENUE

BIG CITY, AB T5T 5T5



Cedar Hills Studio
p.o. box 485
Edmonton, Alberta

What a wonderful place this would be...



My mom, she's never sick. And me and my sisters take care of her. There are 6 of us who take turns sleeping over there. She can still take care of herself but we worry in case she falls. And that probably makes a difference, she has us, she knows we'll take care of her.

I think that makes a difference, if you have family who takes care of you. And with us sisters, we take care of each other, we help each other when we're sick, and even financially. But that's not true for everyone. And even in my community, some people won't help their elders. Not everybody wants to take care of others because life is busy. You're pretty lucky if your child watches over you when you're an old person.

Pauline

...if everyone was as nice as you.

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS...

I DID NOT EXPECT TO BE DISABLED, IN A WHEELCHAIR. I DIDN'T EXPECT TO ACQUIRE MENINGITIS WHICH TOOK EVEN MORE AWAY FROM ME. I DIDN'T EXPECT NEEDING A LEVEL OF HOMECARE THAT I NEED AT SUCH AN EARLY AGE. I'M THRILLED TO LIVE IN ALBERTA BECAUSE WE HAVE A LOT OF SERVICES. HOME CARE HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY WONDERFUL. THEY'VE COME TOGETHER AS A TEAM AND HAVE IDENTIFIED NEEDS THAT EVEN I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD. I DIDN'T EXPECT TO NEED THIS LEVEL OF CARE IN MY 50s. BUT WITH ALL THESE SERVICES I'M ABLE TO WORK, PARTICIPATE IN RECREATION, DRIVE AND ACCESS A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS.

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I BELIEVED THAT I WAS INDESTRUCTIBLE: I WOULDN'T GET OLD, I WOULDN'T GET SICK, I WOULDN'T HAVE TRAGEDY. I WAS MORE INTERESTED IN BEING POPULAR, ACQUIRING THINGS. I DIDN'T GIVE THE FUTURE A THOUGHT, NOT FINANCIALLY. I WOULD TELL YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY TO RELAX, TAKE CARE OF BODY AND MIND, BECAUSE WHAT SEEMS SO IMPORTANT TODAY WON'T BE DOWN THE ROAD. DO THINGS YOU ENJOY RATHER THAN THINGS YOU ARE DRIVEN TO DO, ESPECIALLY BY PEER PRESSURE. AN ELDER TOLD ME THAT WHATEVER IS IN YOUR HEART, THAT'S WHERE YOUR GIFTS ARE. SO WHATEVER YOU DESIRE TO DO, WHATEVER YOU DREAM OF DOING, THAT'S WHAT YOU SHOULD DO BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE YOUR GIFTS WILL BE. AND THE SOONER YOU LEARN TO LAUGH AT YOURSELF, THE HAPPIER YOU'LL BE.

I THINK MY GREATEST FEAR IS THE LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE. NOW, I ENJOY A GREAT AMOUNT OF FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE BUT AS THE MEDICAL CONDITIONS DETERIORATE, IT IS FEASIBLE THAT SOME OF THAT IS GOING TO BE LOST. AND NO ONE LOOKS FORWARD TO BEING IN CARE. BUT THAT'S ANOTHER MILESTONE OF SORTS AND I DON'T DREAD IT AND IT DOESN'T TAKE AWAY FROM MY ENJOYMENT OF THE DAY. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE FACILITIES AND SERVICES THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE. WE HAVE A VARIETY OF THOSE. I HOPE THAT MY HUSBAND AND I CAN STAY TOGETHER IN THE SAME PLACE FOR MANY YEARS. I HOPE WE CAN CONTINUE TO TRAVEL. AND I REALLY HOPE I CAN STAY ENGAGED IN THE THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO ME IN THE LIVES OF MY FAMILY AND CHILDREN, SERVICE IN THE CHURCH AND STAY CONNECTED TO FRIENDS.

CARRIELYNN, 57



My name is Rosa and I am a senior from Yugoslavia. I came to Canada seven years ago, sponsored by my son who immigrated to this country as a refugee about 10 years ago.

Yugoslavia is the most beautiful place in the world. Sadly, killing, torture, rape and dying were a part of our lives for almost 10 years at the end of the 20th century. Many of us had no choice but to leave and build our nests far away from home. This is how I found myself in Canada, the second most beautiful country in the world.

Although we consider ourselves very fortunate to resettle and join our children in such a peaceful and prosperous land, often times our life in this country is a struggle to carry on. Imagine an old tree replanted from another continent. How likely is it that this tree will survive? It is the same with us.

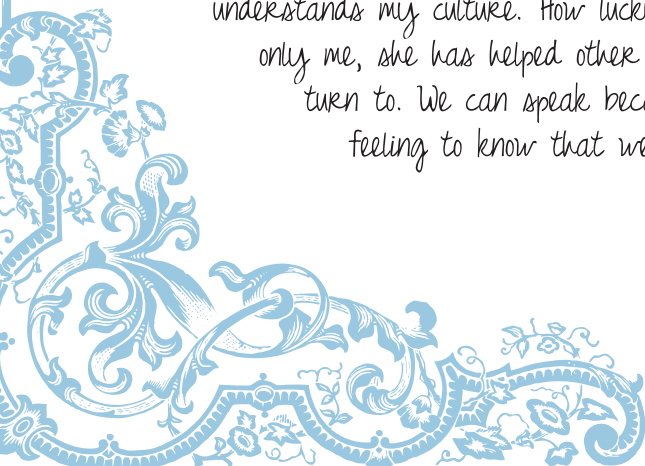
I can see Canadians are very friendly. I wish I could talk to them and share my story. There are hundreds of people living in my building. It hurts me to know that there is no one I can talk to. I cannot say much in English. Canadian libraries are well equipped. I love to read and I wish I could take out all the books there. Unfortunately, I live my life under imposed conditions of illiteracy. A multitude of health, family, finance, age and transportation issues are preventing us from learning the language.

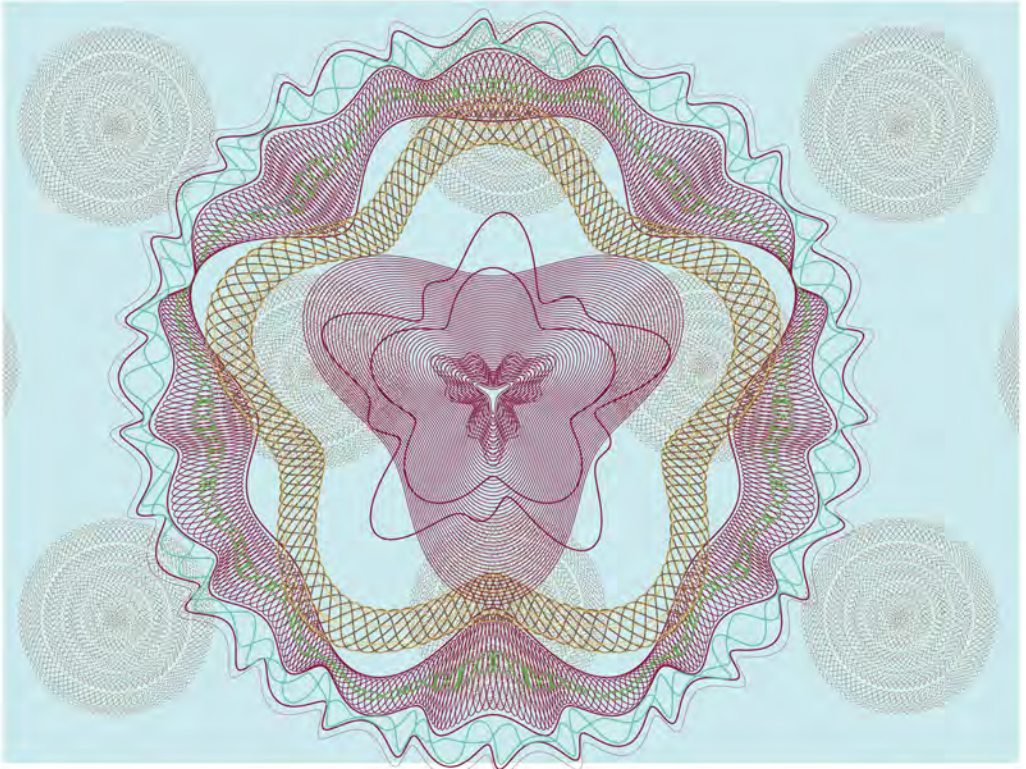
We live among thousands, and yet, we are isolated. We often question our identity! Once we were highly respected in our families and the society at large. Suddenly, nobody turns to us as we do not know anything here. There was a time I was valued as an educator and an economist. But now, I cannot assist my grandchildren with basic homework. "You do not know, grandma." is what my little one says. I know that I do not know because I cannot say what I know.

My children are really good to me. They will do anything to help me. But, how much can I ask for? How much should I burden them? Ten years of sponsorship is a long period of time! Their plate is already full. They need help themselves. I wish I could help them.

Two years ago I got in touch with a cultural broker who speaks my language and understands my culture. How lucky I felt to meet somebody who could help me. And not only me, she has helped other seniors from Yugoslavia. We finally have someone to turn to. We can speak because she understands our language. It is a wonderful feeling to know that we are somebody and that somebody cares.

Rosa





About Nestor:

There needs to be more accommodation for people with disabilities as they age. He is no longer able to participate in many of the activities he used to do. He really likes bowling but it is getting tougher for him to do as he physically gets older. He also likes walking and TV. He needs a group to do things with. I hope that there will be living accommodation that will more suit his style. Where he is living, it's a seniors' residence and he can't participate in their activities, like bingo and other things the residents do... There is nothing available right now. We're looking for a group home. Then, he could be around people but have his own private bedroom and bathroom.

The problem is that group homes don't have their own medical staff. It also has to be in the community where he has always lived.

Thinking of you

*with love
Laverne*



This community, they offer what we need. They offer computer courses and I thought I never wanted to learn about computers. But then I realized that if I wanted to stay connected, I needed to learn how to use them. And I've taken a few courses and really enjoyed them. And the library offers various courses and talks. And there are so many activities offered and you can interact with a lot of people. And it's free or at least very affordable. All those things are offered to you. And here there's a van that will take you to your doctors appointment for a very small fee.

The town paper tells you about all these things and if you don't take advantage, you're losing out. And then the walking trails that are kept so well by the city, they're kept clear and ice free all winter long. So, even when sidewalks are not looked after, you can use these trails. And without all of this, your world just shrinks. See, when you're working you go out every day and are stimulated by the presence of other people. But when you retire you can easily stay at home a lot and you can lose that stimulation.

Madeline



Thank You

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE MULTICULTURAL WOMEN AND SENIOR SERVICES ASSOCIATION. THEY HELP A LOT, PROVIDING SERVICES LIKE BUS PASSES AND ALSO EXERCISE CLASSES. THESE EXERCISES ARE VERY ENJOYABLE AND THE LEADER IS LOVELY. THE ATMOSPHERE IS FRIENDLY AND SO MANY PEOPLE TAKE PART IN THE CLASS. THIS KIND OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IS IMPORTANT TO MY HEALTH.

I COME FOR EXERCISE,
I SOCIALIZE WITH PEOPLE

WHO ARE SIMILAR TO ME. ALSO WE HAVE FUN ACTIVITIES, LIKE PICNICS AND OUTINGS. WE VISIT SITES AROUND THE CITY, LIKE THE MUTTART.

WE HAVE THINGS LIKE PHOTO CONTESTS, PAINTING AND ART CLASSES, GAMES.

THERE ARE PRIZES SOMETIMES. THIS IS IMPORTANT TO THE COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY TO SENIORS. ALSO THERE ARE LANGUAGE CLASSES, SEWING CLASSES, COMPUTER CLASSES.

HAJI SHER



Don't wait until you're older to live a healthier lifestyle. Start incorporating that into your younger life. Start exercising even if it's only 20 minutes a day, while you're working. And set aside more money, retirement is easier. We know people who live on their pension and it's just not enough. Prepare for it, you know it's coming. And always have a positive attitude. Don't regard age as "Ugh, I'm turning 50, I'm getting old" It's a journey and that's where you are in your journey. Don't look at it as something negative. As I've said, it's a very good time of your life.

Madeline



Mrs. Jane Doe
1242 Evergreen Terrace
Small Town, AB
T8S 1H8



Messages from the Heart

2.25 USA 3.00 Canada
CARD - 4096



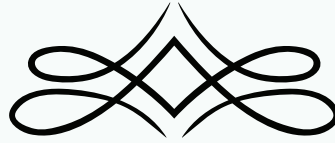
Thank You

I find this care giving is very stressful and has aged me 10 years. I had been living out of province and I came back to care for our mother, and Nestor had always lived with her. And so, it just kind of fell to me to be primary caregiver. Even for me, finding a better living accommodation for Nestor would make it easier.

I get called several times a week from his residence, telling me that he needs me to come over. This is because he becomes over emotional and can't be calmed. And, of course, I have to take him to all his appointments.

*Your help made
all the difference.*

*Thanks again,
Eunice*



When I retired, I wrote a book, the story of my life. And I had it bound, though not published. Just after I finished my book, I read an ad in a seniors' paper for the Geri Actors. They were asking for actors, especially male, and I asked myself, "Could I do this? Why not give it a try?" And I did, and I found out I could!

I like performing on the stage. I never thought I would but I do. It expands your mind; there are unlimited possibilities if you have the courage to do it. I enjoy it very much, for several reasons: it keeps you involved in an activity you enjoy. The people become sort of like family. It keeps you socially involved, you can contribute. Everybody is accepted and appreciated. And you meet with like-minded people who also want to keep active and stay involved, so you have a lot in common.

We do our own works mostly. Somebody tells a story and we think about if we can make a play with it and we work on it. The basic story is there but there are many things that we add. No story is too foolish or crazy. This year we performed seven times. We have different skits - "Goose", "Invisible", "Mel's Story" - we would do those three in one location. "Invisible" was very powerful, because a lot of older people either think or in reality become invisible with age.

From September to December we have university students in with the Geriactors and we put on plays together. That has been very fruitful and enlightening. There's always that danger, as you grow old, that you say, "Oh, the young people are over there," and they say, "Oh, the old people are over there." But when you start interacting, there are an awful lot of nice young people. Our coffee breaks are great. The ladies bring cake and cookies and people really open up. The students really like the coffee breaks!

John, St. Albert

When you're young I don't think you really think about it, about getting older. You do very little of thinking about it in your youth and even as you grow older, you have to be about 50 years old before you realize you are getting older. You expect it to be as good when you are young, and it just isn't that way. If it doesn't catch you this year, it will next.

It went very quickly. All at once it's here. And no one ever advised me to prepare for it. When I think back, no one ever said, "You better do this or prepare for that." All my parents ever said was "When you get to be my age you'll know what I'm talking about."

The older you get, there always seems to be something going wrong. Physically more than mentally. I don't know about in other countries, places where they don't or can't look after you. We're really fortunate here. I've had two knees replaced and two hips replaced and here they take such good care of you physically. Without that, I'd be in a wheelchair.

As I watch other people, I fear losing my driver's licence, because of my health. One of my friends, he's just lost his licence and he can't hardly handle it. I'd fear that. I don't know why they won't give him his licence. Another thing is that I hope the government doesn't run out of money, that they can keep sending my cheque!

Norm



Place
Stamp
Here

I want to live a long time. I don't eat too much junk food. Drink lots of water. I think I'll have to do those all the time. Also go to the doctor when you are sick. Like if you throw up, have some freezies.

Gage
