

was very great.... Elderly people rarely retired to make way for the young.... Th

MANY WAYS OF GROW

SOPHIE

On Sophie's 70th birthday, five of her friends took the senior citizens' bus to the nearest large town (50 cents round trip, payment optional) and treated her to a Chinese dinner. They chose that restaurant for two reasons: Sophie likes that kind of food, and the washrooms are on the ground floor. Sophie can't climb stairs since her heart attack.

It was a festive meal—all the ladies in their best slack suits, with costume jewelry and their gray hair carefully arranged. After the fortune cookies, Sophie retired to the washroom while the others divided the check. She came out looking tired and a little tearful. She dreaded going home.

Sophie lives with her son and daughter-in-law and their children. "They're wonderful to me and I love them. But I'd like to have a place of my own," Sophie says.

She has always had a well-defined place of her own. Born in one of New York City's Polish neighborhoods, she went to school and church with the children of her mother's friends. At 19 she married a boy from the same neighborhood. Sixteen years and three children later, he was killed in an industrial accident, and Sophie was left with a handful of unpaid bills and a family to support.

"I thought I had it hard in those days, but now I'd like to go back, to be 40 again, with the kids growing up." She worked first in a button factory, then in a bakery, then as a supermarket cashier. The supermarket retires its employees at 65. Sophie was piecing out her social security as a part-time cleaning woman when the heart attack struck her down. When she moved to the country town where her son makes his home, the neighbors gave her a good-bye party.

"Take it easy for a change," they told her. "You've earned it. Enjoy the fresh air, the nice clean water, the peace and quiet. Nobody mugging you in the street. You've got it made."

Maybe. With no rent to pay, Sophie makes a token contribution to the family food budget and keeps up with her heavy bills for dental and optical care (two areas not covered by Medicare although they're of top importance to virtually everyone over 65). She has a TV set in her bedroom, helps with the dishes, stays with the children when their mother goes shopping. Three of four days a week she lunches at the nearby meal site, and stays for the arts-and-crafts meeting where she is teaching knitting and learning macrame.

But Sophie is homesick. The murmur of the brook that flows past the house is no substitute for the street noises she used to take for granted. The A&P isn't her corner store. The church isn't St. Ignatius, and she doesn't really know the young priest.

The dishes she washes aren't her dishes. The children aren't hers either. She loves them, but when the big yellow school bus picks them up, she welcomes the quiet. "I'm getting too old for

this," she tells the other grandmothers, and they agree.

Sophie and her friends talk about her situation. She can't go back to New York: she sold her furniture; she can't climb stairs; she can't cope with the monoxide, the hoodlums, the traffic. She has thought about finding a place of her own—a small furnished apartment within walking distance of the grocery and the postoffice. The trouble is, apartments are all upstairs over stores, or in private homes. Besides, she's really afraid to live alone. Suppose she had an attack in the night?

The doctor says she has asthma because she hasn't made the adjustment. Sophie's had a lot of practice making adjustments before in her life. "It's different when you're young. You keep hoping things will be better some day. Now there isn't any more some day. What I've got now, that's what I'm going to have."

She gets off the bus at her son's front gate. The five friends, backs and feet tired from the outing, watch as she plods up the path, carrying a little bag of fortune cookies for the children.

One says, "At least I've got a place of my own." The others nod and sigh.

—Valerie Taylor

JUD

Jud's house is full of fiddles. Not violins; fiddles. Some are more than 100 years old. They were made by his father, who, like Jud, was a caller for square dances when he was young. "Danced all night in them days," Jud says, "and went to work in the gravel pit next morning. We had some times, I can tell you."

Although his hands are gnarled into claws, Jud still plays his fiddles. If you go to see him, you're likely to find him stringing or tuning or polishing a satiny case. "Curly maple, this one is. Seasoned it four years before I put a knife to it. Can't hurry wood."

Actually you might have some trouble getting into his house to see his collection. Jud won't let in anyone who wants to "do him good." "I don't need any charity, by God." The house is tall and narrow, the clapboards weathered to gray, the fence sagging, the stone wall that divides the backyard from the pasture falling down. Indoors everything is covered with dust and the air is close. There are ashes on the kitchen floor; the unused front-room stove is rusty.

Now and then the public health nurse jollies her way in, gets Jud into the bathtub, washes and trims his hair, and takes a bulging sack of clothes to the laundromat. The store delivers his groceries. He eats mostly cereal, except for the substantial lunch he takes five days a week at the town's meal site.

The lunch is free for those who are unable to pay, but Jud puts a dollar in the little envelope beside his plate every day although his social security is minimal and the taxes on his place get higher every year. He means to hold on to his house and yard. (The farm was sold long ago.) "I was born here and I figure on dying here. Me

and the Old Man are on good terms. When he wants me, all he has to do is call me."

Jud can ride back and forth to the meal site in a car subsidized by the government. Someone brings him his plate and cuts up his meat while the hardier stand in line to be served. At home he can make it from the woodpile to the kitchenstove (the only heat he has) and to the cupboard, the bathroom and the telephone. Unless the snow is too deep, he can also make it to the RFD mailbox, 50 feet downhill from the front porch. "Damn mailman never brings me anything worth reading." He stopped taking the weekly newspaper last time they raised the price.

Two years ago Jud was pretty shaky. He's picked up some since he started getting five solid meals a week. He joins in the table talk with gusto, has strong ideas on politics—get him started on Richard Nixon and the Methodist ladies have to cover their ears. He doesn't mind being teased about being a ladies' man. Sometimes he brings one of his fiddles and plays after the meal.

When winter sets in, the women who run the meal site start worrying about Jud. "He'll never make it through. Remember last year he had pneumonia and wouldn't see a doctor?" (The driver of the pick-up car took him his hot lunch for more than a month while he was sick.)

"He ought to go into the Extended Care Unit."

"He'd meet whoever came for him with a shotgun."

"He'll take sick some night and let the fire go out and they'll find him frozen stiff."

"Well, what can you do?"

There's nothing anyone can do, but that doesn't stop a person from worrying.

"Live Free or Die" is the state motto in New Hampshire. At 88, barely five feet tall and weighing less than 100 pounds; his face dominated by a beaky nose and fierce blue eyes, Jud has every intention of dying free, whenever the Old Man gets around to him.

—Valerie Taylor

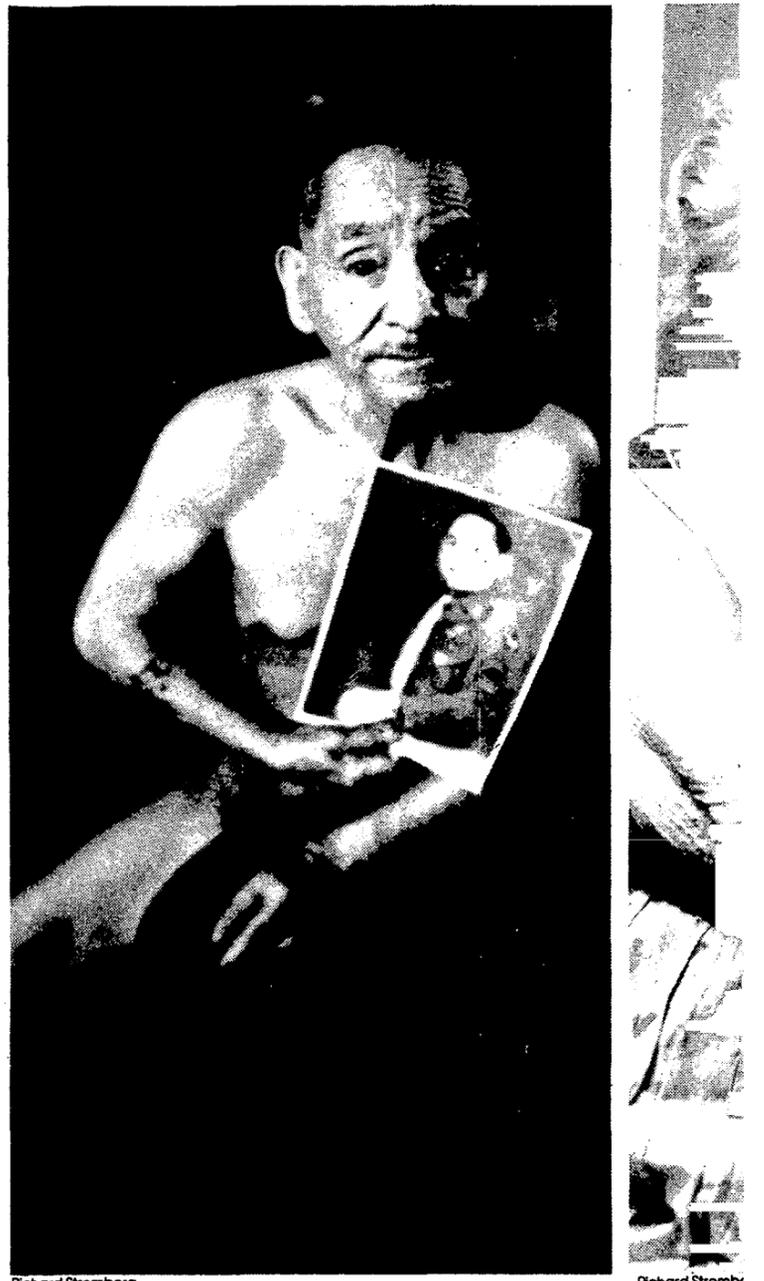
HENRY

Henry lives in one room in Uptown, one of Chicago's poorer neighborhoods. To get there you walk up two flights of garbage-strewn stairs and down a long hallway with no lights.

In his room are: a mattress, two chairs, a small sink with a cabinet, a hotplate and tin pot, a radiator. No table. No bureau. Two overflowing bags of garbage. A dank smell. And bugs, bugs crawling over it all. Spiders. Roaches of many sizes. And some smaller bugs. It's very dark in the room, hard to see. Maybe they're baby roaches. An awful lot of baby roaches.

Henry runs his hands through thinning, dirty grey hair above a sallow face and apologizes about the bugs. He looks at his room through my eyes, and the life he's got used to suddenly embarrasses him. "This place is a wreck," he says with a little laugh.

He's glad to have a visitor—even one who's taking down what he says in a notebook. Very



Richard Stromberg

Richard Stromberg

people in the prime of their productive years. We should encourage a plurality c

was respect without affection, veneration without love. Old age was exalted by

ING OLD



Ann Osborn



few people talk to him nowadays. He's in his 70s. Between his social security and a small pension from his years as a warehouse worker, he gets about \$1,900 a year. His room costs \$125 a month, including heat and electricity. Fortunately he only pays two-thirds of that. A federal program pays the rest.

The only clothes I see (besides the green work shirt and pants he's wearing) are two shirts on the bed and a navy blue sweater hanging on the doorknob. I ask him about the big freeze last year. Was there enough heat in the building?

He says the heat stayed on all winter. "But those kids broke my window, and no one came to fix it for a week. And then," he shakes his head, smiling sadly, "boy, was it cold!"

Down the hall is one of the two bathrooms that serve the people who live in 30 rooms along this hallway. There's never any hot water, and the toilet regularly backs up and the landlord takes a week to fix it.

Henry's garbage is full of empty soup cans. He says he eats soup, corned beef hash, spaghetti. He used to drink coffee once or twice a week at a nearby restaurant, but no more. It just costs too much. Does he ever go hungry at the end of the month? "Yes, sometimes," he answers but says no more about it.

He shops for his own groceries, walking the streets in fear. One Sunday morning about a year ago two teenage boys knocked him down, broke his glasses and stole his wallet. He lost \$25—all the money he had for the rest of that month. "And people drove by in cars, saw it all and did nothing!" The police talked to him, but they too did nothing.

Now he goes out only at busy times of the day. "Kids today, they run the streets. It was different when I was a kid; then you tipped your hat, you showed some respect. If you didn't, you'd get a beating."

Henry's chief worry is the row of medicine bottles on the sink. They are for arthritis and heart trouble, and they are almost empty. He was supposed to go back to the clinic for more last week, but he had no money for busfare. A neighbor says he will go to the clinic and pick up the medicine. But will they give it to him? He wonders. "They get mad if you don't come back just when they say to, you know."

"I worked all my life, and this is all I have," he says, his hand gesturing at the peeling paint on the walls, the six-inch hole in the floor, the bugs. His wife died 15 years ago. They had no children. A nephew used to come and see him, but he has disappeared. Henry's voice grows angry when he speaks of his nephew.

He's angry that old people like himself aren't better cared for, but like many Americans, he mainly blames himself. His situation makes him doubt even his right to hold opinions.

What should be done to make things better, I ask.

"Why do you ask me? I'm old, just waiting to die. You know more than me."

—Judy MacLean



Jane Melnick

STELLA

In 1972, Stella Francis, a retired R.N., sat amid her senior citizens group, listening to Maggie Kuhn of the Gray Panthers. Francis had never been an activist before, "but you never know when you'll become inspired to get off your rocker. I found it was a hidden thing I'd been wanting to do all my life."

Soon she found herself going across town to meetings in all kinds of weather. "We started on food stamps, and were able to get them for quite a few people who weren't receiving them, but were eligible," she recalls. "Then we went on to get more senior citizen housing."

They were winning that too, but Francis discovered that "It wasn't what I wanted. They offered me a beautiful place, and I refused to move there. That's what a Panther is about—we should be with people of all ages."

Today, at age 72, Stella Francis works five days a week as the Chicago Gray Panthers' only staffperson. As we sit in the tiny downtown office, our talk is interrupted by phone calls. People want literature, information. The weekly radio show must be planned. A member stops by with a copy of a legislation to prepare Francis for a confrontation with Sen. Charles Percy later in the week.

She loves her work. She showed up last winter in the worst snow storm of the Big Freeze. "Retirement can kill you. I know a man, he retired Dec. 31 and Died Jan. 2. All of a sudden, now, the government has discovered 65 isn't so bad. Now they want to make it 70. We say, if

you're qualified, you should stay on the job as long as you want."

A chance to keep on contributing through work is one way senior citizens can stay alive, healthy and happy. But there is another important factor. Love.

"I have nieces and nephews, they all stop by or call, sometimes only to say, 'Hello, old lady, just want to see how you're doing.' When they call me 'old lady' it's not with disrespect—it's done with love," she says.

Although she never married, she lives amid an extended family, with nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grand-nephews, even great-grandnieces and nephews. She describes their love as a blanket wrapping her, keeping her warm. She speaks of a life knit together by thousands of tiny events: helping toddlers to take first steps; the same child stopping by a few years later for an after-school cookie or staying for a summer when Francis wasn't working. High school graduations. Marriages, or, "Just as likely today, moving-in-together."

"You have to have children around. We need to surround ourselves with love. If we did that, we wouldn't all be sick."

Senior citizens lose so much, shut off away from the young, she says. But the young lose out, too. She remembers the older people from her own childhood, many different adults she could turn to.

With so many children of working parents who aren't getting enough care, she asks, why doesn't society use the large group of older people who could help? "Hire someone my age to

be with them. Let us pour our love over the babies."

After old age, inevitably, comes death. But love and work can change the meaning of death. Francis remembers the death of her sister-in-law, with whom she had lived for many years. She had a stroke, but "we brought her right home. If she'd been around a lot of other people with strokes, she'd have given in to it. But she was around all her children and grandchildren. She regained the use of her arm and leg. We said, whatever happens, it will happen together. She visited all her brothers and sisters, and one day she sat down, and peacefully closed her eyes, with no fear—and died."

Now, the family goes on. Stella Francis has become the senior "old lady." When she's gone, there will be another. She'd like to see the Gray Panthers fight to reintegrate old and young, to knit us all into new, loving patterns. "It's the only thing that will save this country," she says.

She's fighting with the Panthers against forced retirement of people over 65 at Carson, Pirie Scott department store. "It occurred to us that Santa Claus is over 65. So we all dressed up like Santa and said, fire him first. Now people who work there have a choice about retirement."

She pickets the American Medical Association's convention. ("They just charge too much.") She marches against nuclear weapons in the rain. And she lives with the children. "They are the future. And who would dare live without our future?" she asks.

—Judy MacLean

hics in its place... We must make room for all of these values. For only on that