

Forever Young

Barbara Zapotocky-Cook, DC

I would like to salute the generation of seniors that are presently in their late 70s and early 80s. The members of this generation are a special breed. They lived through the Great Depression, participated in a world war effort and are the pioneers of the anti-aging trend. In general, these individuals have a very strong sense of who they are.

Last night, my folks celebrated their 52nd wedding anniversary. As I recount a brief history of their lives, see what events signal similar memories for you, your parents or your patients.

Both sets of my grandparents were first-generation Americans, so as children, neither of my folks spoke English at home. Learning and education were always encouraged and have become lifelong habits. America was in the heyday of an industry and after high school, my father trained to become a machinist. A tradesman from this generation could actually get a repair fixed right the first time. Attending secretarial school, my mother actually learned shorthand, used a typewriter, and even carbon paper!

Mom was among the first group of women to enlist in the Army that were known as the Women's Army Corps (WACS). My father took a job at Pearl Harbor as a machinist. Once the war efforts really took off, both of their skills were in great demand.

When the war ended, my folks were married. She moved to the islands, and my father took a job at Dole Pineapple. This was a boom time for both Hawaii and the pineapple industry, so work was challenging, and he advanced with more responsibility. With Dad as the only wage earner, Mom worked as a magician. Her job was to make those dollars appear again and again as the family's needs dictated. I've often thought my mom could have been a top CEO because of her management skills and her personnel style. Both were masters at what they did. Together their loyalty and the company's success were good for each other. He retired 30 years later at age 62 and still receives health care benefits and a retirement check from the same company.

Mom and Dad built their own lives in a place of their own choosing far from their families. Their steadfast beliefs in their own abilities and their determination to succeed coupled with youth and genuine love of people propelled them into a community that was just starting to grow. They participated with a full schedule of activities that involved school, church, kids, sports and home improvement. They volunteered their time for the March of Dimes, Easter Seals and other community efforts, and of course played tour guide to literally thousands of visitors.

On Tuesday evenings they attended a course called "The Science of Success." They were taught how to identify their goals in life and then chart a precise course to achieve them. Their goals were simple but meaningful: vibrant health; being good parents and loving partners; having work that was challenging; making enough to support their family; and home ownership.

Now in their 80s, they have rewarded themselves with all of these goals. Their biggest dividend has been the gift of good health. It is this reward that allows them to continue to participate in life fully. Two years ago for her 80th birthday, my mother got a new Gateway computer; last Fourth of July (at age 82), I dropped her off at the park for a team tug-of-war. My dad still surfs every morning. Both are still as eager as kids when they wake up each day. Boy, this is going to be a tough act to follow!

If you have a story to send me along these lines, please write to me, or you can send an e-mail at the address below. Aloha.

Barbara Zapotocky, DC, MA
3030 Hibiscus Drive
Honolulu, HI 96815
DrZapotocky@hotmail.com

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