



Debunking myths about aging

It's time to look at growing older
in a whole new light.

By **PATRICIA ARIADNE, PH.D., MFT**

I am noticing a wonderful phenomenon in my social circles and psychotherapy practice: many individuals in their 50s and 60s are "rebooting" to face new challenges and activities in life. Instead of gearing up for the golf course or the couch, they are seeking out new endeavors that, in most cases, are far different from their previous careers. They are planning a new lease in life by doing work that is oriented toward creative self-expression and service.

It is clear to me that what was once "old age" needs a new title and designation: persons in their fifth and sixth decades are developing a new stage for which they are utilizing their past skills, talents and experiences to "give back" to society in healing and inspired ways.

More than 35 million persons, or about 13 percent of the population in the U.S. today, are 65 years of age or older. Between the year 2020 and 2030, the number of baby boomers will more than double. The result will be that one in five Americans will be over 65. This generation, according to the 2013 Aging in America Conference, will be tasked with formulating a new model of life. Author Gail Sheehy, a member on the Conference panel of experts, called the lifespan of mid-50s to the early 70s the *Grand Tweens*,

asserting that many in this age group are pathfinders and pioneers who are looking for a renewed sense of purpose.

Instead of chasing all things youthful, our culture would do well to adopt the perspective of global cultures that encourage respect for elder wisdom. "Growing older" should be seen as an entrance into a new life of self-expression, productivity, and service. This is a time when we can rely on hard-earned life experience to be less self-critical as well as less concerned with the judgments of others. This cycle of life should bring greater self-acceptance, with a solid sense of cohesion and confidence at the core of ourselves.

Most importantly, we need to love who we are becoming as we age, to be comfortable in our own skins. This is the result of inner

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work. If we do not process our life experiences, cultivate a spiritual connection, or learn how to be of service to others, then we are at a loss when our looks inevitably fade. If in your 50s and 60s you can say that you like yourself more than ever before, you are on the right track.

FLOURISHING LATER IN LIFE

Some of the people mentioned on the right are examples of "late bloomers," or individuals who did not hit their stride until much later in life. Others are examples of "productive aging," persons who continue to contribute to society into late age. ►

JULIA CHILD didn't learn to cook until she was 40, and it wasn't until she was 51 that she launched her popular cooking show on PBS.

HARRISON FORD got his big film break in *Star Wars* at age 35.

CLINT EASTWOOD became the oldest leading man to reach number one in weekend box office. with his movie, *Gran Torino*. He directed his first film at 41.

The book *A River Runs through It*, which was later made into a movie, was written by **NORMAN MACLEAN** when he was 74.

DOC PASKOWITZ, subject of the 2007 documentary, *Surfwise*, was filmed surfing every day at age 84.

While most athletes peak early, in 2010 47-year-old **JAMIE MOYER** of the Philadelphia Phillies became the oldest pitcher to beat the Yankees.

STAN LEE, the creator of *Spider-Man*, was 43 when he began drawing his world-famous comic book superheroes.

COLONEL (HARLAN) SANDERS of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame began his franchise while in his 60s.

LAURA INGALLS WILDER'S popular *Little House* books were written when she was in her 60s.

Renowned artist Anna Mary Robertson Moses, better known as **GRANDMA MOSES**, didn't begin to paint until age 76. ■

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