

## Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be

In America old people and young people are cast in separate roles, as though speaking different languages, and living in different worlds with different aims, and requiring different solutions to problems. Let us look at ourselves.

Perhaps one of the saddest misunderstandings between younger people and older people is that the latter don't like the former. While it is admitted that a great many older people are **afraid** of some younger ones, relatively few older people feel any animosity toward youth except when feeling threatened.

Young people cannot imagine calling on muscles that no longer respond, seeking a balance or fleetness of foot that no longer exists, or viewing a knot of four or five adolescents with apprehension. Understanding by young people of reasons to fear can dispel that fear and make of older people the staunchest supporters of the young.

If, at the approach of an older person, younger ones speak politely and kindly, their greetings will be warmly returned, their reassurances gratefully acknowledged. Older people don't have any **desire** to feel frightened...

Older people have plenty of problems; young people have plenty of problems, too. Both groups have a great deal in common; far more, in fact, than either recognizes.

Young people are often lonely. Older people are, too.

Young people are sometimes selfish. And so are older people.

Young people are interested in sex. So are older people. (Do cats chase mice? Do dogs bark?)

Young people are determined to do things their own way. Older people are set in their ways.

Young people are politically liberal. So are many older people.

Who are the young, who the old? Where do we draw the lines? Are we young until we reach 30? Before our 45th birthday? Up to the day we hit 60? Who decides? And why?

Looking closely at Americans we call elderly, we find the most diverse group in our population. Americans who are now between 60 and 100 years of age grew up before radio and television homogenized them. In general, today's young people are more alike than older people. Life on a farm 60 years ago was radically different from life in a big city; country schools were vastly different from city schools; country transportation facilities were a far cry from those in the city.

Even if it were not for modern media and mobility, older people have always been a more diverse population than younger ones; by virtue of having been around longer, they have had a greater variety of experiences. People are influenced by circumstances they encounter along the paths of life.

Clearly, classifying Americans by age is irrational. A 60-year-old man is no more like a 100-year-old woman than a 20-year-old man resembles a 60-year-old woman. The only thing either pair has in common is the 40-year age-span separating them.

Not long ago people worried about the communications gap, and adolescents believed they couldn't trust anyone over 30. Those who were then adolescents are now, themselves, over 30, and their parents are pushing 60. People don't change; the challenges they must meet do, and their roles do; people carry their values throughout their adult lives. We are more alike, as a people, than we once were; we grow more alike as time passes. Our nation matures. Our attitudes toward ourselves, young and old, must mature as well.