

# “This Chair Rocks” — A Manifesto Against Ageism

Everyone has an age and everyone is aging older one day at a time. You know this of course, but do you ever really think about it? Let's take a look at this issue along with the author of this manifesto. It's an issue that our modern society prefers to ignore with many even pretending to be a different age. Youngsters dress and act like they are older. However you'll find adults and seniors often pretending to be another, usually younger, age. I do remember, receiving my PhD in Psychology at age 26, trying to appear older and wiser as I ventured from Harvard Yard into the real world. Now I look in the mirror and wonder how I could look younger. So it goes. Do read this book whether you are young or old, as it provides a perspective through the decades. The author of this book, Ashton Applewhite, journeys into her future as she states that she is now an older person. Well Applewhite is actually 63 which may seem young to some of us but actually it's never too early to look into the years to come. This book is certainly worth reading as it provides a lot of information, data, and caring reflections about these issues. In my opinion the book provides more of her personal observations than I need, but she does describe many valuable facts and ideas worth consideration.

The book begins with the realization that: oh my gosh, I may be an old person, either now or later. Good news: over half of people 85 or older can and do go about their everyday activities without personal assistance. Only 10 percent of these very senior adults live in nursing homes. Many of the other very elderly adults can live in their homes with some access to helpers. More good news: only 4 percent of Americans over 65 live in nursing homes. Most of us will avoid that fate!

What about happiness in our older years? This book assures us that we actually become more content as we advance through the decades and even as we lose some skills and abilities. This occurs in spite of the fact that our culture is youth-centric and we suffer from ageism just as our culture suffers from sexism and other -isms. Aging should not be

**Advice Line**

By Dr. Betty Phillips



a pejorative word! Instead of the great respect elders have enjoyed in the past, our culture today is obsessed with youth. Let's not cast our lot with the Beatles as they sang: "Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64?" Let's follow the traditions of previous ages when all revered the intelligence and wisdom of the Elders.

Let's analyze the reasons for the dramatic change over time in the status of elders into disrespect and even fear about the burdens older individuals place onto a younger society. Applewhite provides data and statistics to combat this false premise. As an example, she describes the fear that our culture is being bankrupted by the medical expenses of elderly Americans. It is true that medical expenses do peak in the time period before we die "but that's true whether we die at 18 or 80." Furthermore Applewhite tells us that "people with debilitating illnesses and injuries regardless of age, use the most resources." We are told that we have an excellent medical system. Not correct! Due to problems in our healthcare system, the US is in 42nd place of all countries in life expectancy! We have a lot to learn!

This brings us to a critical issue: whether aging affects our minds as well as bodies including our fear of dementia or Alzheimer's. After study, Applewhite concludes that her own worst fears of dementia have been significantly altered by her studies. "I no longer think it's an inevitable or even likely." As she tells us, most forgetfulness is not Alzheimer's or dementia. Some cognitive processing skills do change with age but as Applewhite has discovered "the normal aging brain enables greater emotional maturity, adaptability to change, and levels of well-being."

Applewhite brings us a fresh and different perspective about the aging brain, but in my opinion does not highlight the clear and decisive difference between "word finding problems" and dementia. The science is clear and has been well documented. According to studies in the Journal of Memory and Language, it is common for people to feel as they get older that they more frequently experience occasions when they cannot immediately retrieve a word they know perfectly well: "It's on the tip of my tongue." Tips of the tongue do increase with age, and this increase is evident as early as the mid-30s." An important point, "At all ages the most common type of word involved in tips of the tongue is proper names. But while forgetting popular names and object names becomes more common as we get older, interestingly abstract words are forgotten less." Other articles very clearly distinguish between "Normal age-related memory changes" such as "Occasional difficulty finding the right word, but no trouble holding a conversation" versus "Symptoms that may indicate dementia" such as "Words are frequently forgotten, misused, or garbled. Repeats phrases in stories in the same conversation."

It is frightening that even trained doctors do not always realize the differences between these age-related changes. Recently I had to figure out how to retrieve one of my clients from an emergency room type of imprisonment at a local hospital. The 77-year-old woman upon admission to the ER had been given powerful medication which affected her cognition and was considered to have some form of dementia needing an involuntary transfer to a different type of facility. I knew that she was upset and confused by the conditions of admission and did have word-finding problems exacerbated by emotional upset. She improved considerably when I advised her to stop taking the medication and I also appeared with articles about the difference between word-finding problems and dementia. Happily she was released!

"This Chair Rocks" brings important information and perspectives about other issues: health, sex/intimacy issues, independence

traps and end-of-life issues for older Americans. I'll let you read through these important chapters rather than take up more space in this issue of the Chatham County Line. As you do continue reading in this book you will encounter a great deal of new information especially combating our stereotypes about aging. Important is the fact "That the older people are, the less they fear dying!" Applewhite directs us to "Compassion and Choices" an organization that works to "explore choices at the end of life." We should all have input into the choices available to us in this very important part of our life.

One disappointment I have about this book is that Applewhite obviously stays far away from spiritual issues which are critical in formulating a life plan during our final years. But never fear readers, check out my accumulated Chatham County Line articles now printed in the Advice Line section of my website, [www.BettyPhillipsPsychology.com](http://www.BettyPhillipsPsychology.com). Over the years I've been highlighting spiritual issues and directing you to wonderful books which bring these issues alive for you. As we are eternal spirits living in Earth School (as I described in my last article), we can look forward to an eventual transition away from our declining physical body and toward our eternal life!

*Need Advice? Send questions to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. [www.bettyphillipspsychology.com](http://www.bettyphillipspsychology.com).*

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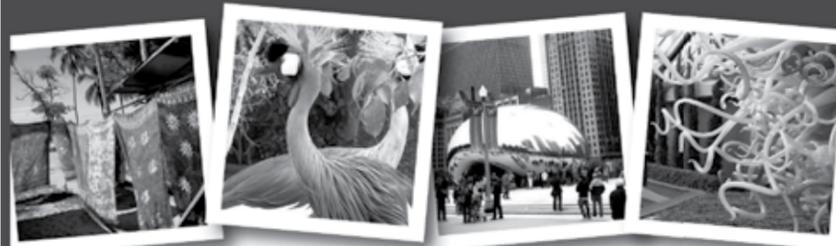
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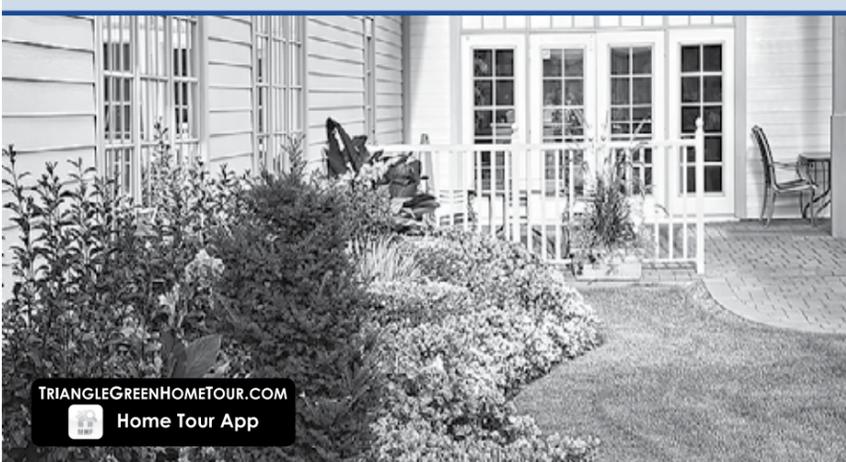
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