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**Baby Boomers Guide to Living Forever
(Chapter on Stress, Life-styles and Relationships)**

How do we launch into the 21st century with our trajectory towards immortality? If that word, "immortality," pushes your button, how about the interim goal of successfully aging past 100 and just keeping your options open? Good! We're now going to embark on an interesting odyssey that can "supercharge" your DNA, the genetic blueprint of our bodies..... our aging program. We're going to explore some of the ways in which we can override our genetic heritage. **"Genes are not about inevitability, but vulnerability."** It is becoming more clear that we have more control over our aging destiny than previously believed. As Norman Cousins has said, "belief creates biology." Later, we'll be discussing more about our belief systems and their astounding impact upon on bodies

At age 77, John Glenn decided that his rocking chair didn't suit him well. He blasted off into space aboard the space shuttle and made it even more clear that aging is a curious animal. Upon landing back on Earth, he said that "life should be lived based on how you feel, not by the calendar." Incidentally, he found a note from 90 year old Senator Strom Thurmond that read, " I want to go too." This stuff about aging is a very curious animal, indeed.

In 1895, only 4% of the U.S. population lived beyond age 65. Today, nearly 80% of the population lives past age 65 (Den Dychtward, Age Wave). By the year 2030, the National Institute of Aging predicts that there will be 61 million baby boomers, past the age of 65. We are living in an era of expanding longevity that continues to challenge our concepts of human life span. Paul Hamilton, a pioneering practitioner of holistic medicine once stated, "I want to die young, as late as possible." That seems to be the direction that we're headed in.

The "longevity belt" of the Caucasus mountains has produced countless centenarians (over 100 years old). In that area, people are considered "young" until age 60. They have specific words for great, great, great grandparents. The population of Abkhasia, for example was noted to have a choir, with members from ages 70 to 110. No doubt, a major limitation in the capacity for human aging has been our encrusted attitude about the time for rocking chairs.

Gay Luce and her SAGE Project (Senior Actualizations and Growth Explorations) discovered that "seniors" between the ages of 65 and 85 could be revitalized...taught to thrive. Many in that group became enthusiastically active and productive when given the incentive and tools to do so. They were more youthful in their actions, appearance, and measurable physical and mental tasks. Clearly, so much of this dimension called "aging" has to do with the gray matter between our ears.

**"People grow old and die because they see others grow old and die."
.....Shankara (Indian Sage)**

A few years ago, Marie Early, an energetic 85 year old woman was briefly hospitalized in New Haven, Connecticut. She was soon scheduled for discharge and her daughter arrived to take her home. Shortly thereafter, the physician announced to her surprised daughter that the discharge was being delayed, since a psychiatric consultation was required. Apparently, Mrs. Early had complained quite strenuously during the previous evening that she needed to go to her father's birthday party. The physician stated that it was obvious that Mrs. Early was delusional..... her father couldn't still be alive. .

But he was! Salvatore Dante Fiore, also of New Haven, Connecticut, was celebrating his 110th birthday. As related by his granddaughter, Pat Glass of Mill Valley, California, Mr. Fiore had his own "immortality" strategies in addition to his fortunate genes. He was a modest eater and cooked his own meals till age 108. Friends were abundant. He made it a point to always remember them with birthday cards. Gardening, photography, and the love of pets were part of his "ageless" routine. He was a happy man, contented with family, and an ever-enlarging circle of friends.

So, what's in store for us as we embark on the Second Millennium? To begin with, we need to learn a little more about **stress** and its various forms. This new "Dawn of Aquarius" is peering at us just around the corner. Our sensory systems are going to be bombarded with ever-increasing forms of electromagnetic streams of wizardry and gadgetry that Bill Gates is dreaming up.....and eons more. We'll be getting e-mail from mysterious corners of the universe, a continuous influx of news data on our digital phone wrist watches, constant phone calls, from Timbuktu or wherever (we're social animals...we crave connection) . The information highway will seem limitless.

Will there be boredom for Boomers in the coming New Age and beyond?....God forbid! There will be mega channels of TV...GPS positioning to get to the local theater...computer shopping....ever-expanding Internet college courses. There will be an unending array of places to visit, on the earth plane and beyond.

All this spells **information overload...sensory overload...electromagnetic energy overload**. It's the yin and the yanglots of good, but increased stress on our bodies.

According to the famous Whitehall study in England, researchers were astonished to find out that health and mortality rates were precisely correlated with civil service grade (high and low social status). They all had jobs, had the same access to medical care from the National Health Service, smoked about the same, and had similar diets. But those who were highest on the social status scale had only one third the mortality rate of those lowest on the civil service scale. The same results were found in a recent U.S. study by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Socioeconomic status and health. Higher level executives had better health and lower death rates than mid and lower level executives.....almost directly correlated.

The primary culprit appears to be varying levels of **stress**.....not poverty or education. This sounds as though modern-day living is quite difficult, and the future is becoming more daunting. Since our goal to reach for "immortality," however, the good news is that we are in control of our own destiny!

But... was life really less stressful in the "good old times".....in days of past, when the saber-toothed tiger was attacking the cave entrance?Or when Chac, the Rain God, decided to cast a draught for seven years?Or, when the Black Plague decimated 2/3 of your village?.... Or, when Noah could only save a few animals and all other creatures (including the two-legged ones) swam during the Great Flood?

Indeed, life was always loaded with life-threatening stresses. Only the most hearty survived to adulthood in the Middle Ages ...even more recently. However.....quite importantly....life was **less** complicated a few centuries ago. Jobs and roles were more clear. Families stayed closer together and were more bonded. There was more community support. People stayed, played and prayed together in tribes or groups. That helped!

Although stress and uncertainty have always been our bedfellows in life, some thrive on it.....some wither with it. If we want to become up and coming centenarians (keeping an open mind, remember?), we need to learn more about the things we have control over. One of the things we can do is understand more about stress, what it does, and how to moderate it. In short, what our brains perceive as stressful has an impact on every tissue and organ in our bodies.

Research studies now indicate that every cell in our body is connected to our brain. These include all cells in our blood, our organs, our nerves, our muscles, our skin. There are receptors throughout our body for the chemical messengers that are sent by the brain. And there are receptors in the brain for the chemical messages sent back from the more distant cells of the body. Therefore, the brain "talks" to every cell in the body.....and every cell "talks" back the brain. There is a continuous communication system going on that would make AT & T envious.

At age 71, Woody Strong was diagnosed with inoperable cancer by cancer specialists in Denver. He was told that he had one year to live. After reflecting on the situation, Woody decided that there was nowhere else he would rather spend his last year than in Nepal, among his many friends. He had been given the name of "father" by many Nepalese because of his kindness and frequent help with medical and school supplies.

There, the unexpected took place. His Nepalese "family" convinced him to visit a renowned Healer in the remote Everest region. With a deep mixture of skepticism and respect for his friends' wishes, Woody consented. For the next five days, he underwent an intensive healing ceremony. He laughed and cried and sweated "for no reason." At the end of the ceremony, the lama told Woody that he was "cured."

Shortly thereafter, Woody returned to Denver for a routine exam. To the amazement of his oncology team, his cancer had undergone a "spontaneous regression." It was gone! He then rededicated his life to building schools and hospitals in Nepal. He also decided to remarry Penny, an equally enthusiastic and dynamic woman. Taking no chances, they decided to remarry on six separate occasions....each in a different religious ceremony.

As of this writing, Woody is in his mid eighties and going strong. He runs the Pennwood Charitable Foundation. in Colorado. Age and illness often seem to wither and fade under the influence of a powerful life purpose. There will be more about that later.

We are now living in a majestic age where science merges with metaphysics ...where Einstein and the Dalai Lama are flip sides of the same coin. It is not difficult to understand how the new science of "psychoneuroimmunology" has made such great strides over the past decade. It is now quite clear that our thoughts and attitudes influence our physical bodies. The Cartesian dualism (separation of mind and body) of the past 500 years is now kaput. There is a direct chemical and neural linkage between our brain and our immune system.

Our incredible immune system is truly an amazing array of interconnecting bio-molecules. ...the brain "talks" to the immune system (receptors from brain on body immune cells) ...so, the brain's view of things (attitude) is extremely important in both the process of aging and healing per se..

"The germ is nothing; the terrain is everything."Claude Bernard

The medical literature is now replete with evidence that the intangibles such as love, joy, passion, purpose, stress can profoundly affect the body's ability to defend itself against foreign and domestic intruders (infections, cancer, etc.)..It was noted over two thousand years ago that depressed people ("melancholic") are more prone to cancer. How many of us are more prone to colds following emotional stress or trauma?

Voodoo death is another example of the profound relationship between our belief systems and our health. In many areas of the world, a local Shaman merely needs to invoke a death sentence and the judged party will be dead within two weeks.....and no one kills him. The accused believes totally that he is going to die....and he does. There are clear interconnections between our brain...our endocrine system (hormones)...and our immune system. What we perceive...real or imagined...produces hormones and other chemical messengers that produce effects on our tissues, and the immune factors in our blood such as natural killer cells, macrophages, helper T cells, etc.

Just a simple thought can give you icy hands or a burning face. Any threat sends a rush of neuropeptides from the brain that prepare the body for action. This is necessary for survival and is called the stress response....or the "fight or flight" reaction. If you are the midst of combat, the stress response can save your life .The brain chemicals prepare our body to fight or flee. When sitting behind the wheel in a highway "parking lot," however, the stress response does some nasty things to our insides. That surge of adrenaline has nothing constructive to do, other than beat up on our tissues.

Persistent, long-term stress is even more damaging. As far as our body is concerned, it doesn't matter if the threat is real or imagined. The stress response happens regardless of outer reality.....it has the same impact.

So, what is the "**stress response**?" If you've studied this in high school biology and are a stress "whiz," skip this section. Read ahead to the detrimental effects of cortisol on our memory systems. Back to the stress response ----we need it in order to survive the unexpected traumas of life, such as wild animal attacks. When faced with danger, our bodies produce certain hormones (chemical messengers) that stimulate us to fight or run.....the famous "fight-or-flight" response. Initially, our brain signals to our adrenal gland to produce **adrenaline**. This wondrous hormone rapidly propels us to action with increases in heart rate, blood pressure, glucose in our bloodstream, diversion of blood to our muscles, more energy production and other marvelous strategies for survival.

Very quickly, more hormones enter the fray. One of these hormones is called **cortisol**. It is a type of glucocorticoid, produced by the adrenal cortex. Among other functions, cortisol stimulates the memory center of the brain to give us more survival options. We need all the recall we can muster at crisis time, right? Life or death may depend on the speed and reliability of our memory bank at that time. Both epinephrine and glucocorticoids (cortisol) stimulate the memory when acutely stressed.

This memory area of the brain is called the hippocampus ("seahorse-shaped"). It is no surprise that the hippocampus is quite sensitive to both epinephrine and cortisol, since the memory center is sparked by strong emotions. And, it is located in the part of the brain called the limbic system, which governs our emotions.

In our modern times, stress frequently becomes chronic. We have mortgages, stock market fluctuations, business competition, traffic frustration.....all gnawing on our tissues. As the stress continues, however, a serious problem begins to occur in the brain. Instead of stimulating the memory center, excessive cortisol begins to damage the neurons of the hippocampus. Not only does cortisol do direct damage, but it also interferes with the uptake of glucose into the hippocampal neurons. The brain must have a continuous supply of glucose to survive. In fact, over 25% of the blood supply is continuously bathing the brain even though it accounts for only 2% of the body's mass. If the stress becomes chronic and cortisol remains at a high level in the bloodstream, the nerve cells of the hippocampus become permanently damaged. This can cause major deterioration in memory and thinking ability (cognitive functioning). Fortunately, this process takes years, allowing those with "enlightened self-interest" to take corrective steps.

Cortisol.....friend or foe? How is it, you might ask, that a hormone designed to save our lives can be such a foe. For an emergency, this hormone works wonderfully to improve memory, bolster all of our senses, deliver glucose to the brain, and prepare our body for action. Like most things in the divine scheme of things, however, there is a delicate chemical balance in our bodies (homeostasis). As we know from the sages of history, too much of anything isn't good.

"The advantage of a bad memory is that one enjoys several times the same good things for the first time."Nietzsche

It has been estimated that there are 100 billion nerve cells in the brainand we lose approximately 100,000 nerve cells a day as we age naturally. That only amounts to about 3 billion nerve cells gone with a "normal" lifespan. There are plenty of brain cells left to have a creative, productive life. And by following the recommendations made in this book, and on the web page, brain cells might achieve "immortal" statusat the very least, quite sharp.

Michaelangelo designed the dome of St. Peter's Cathedral in his nineties. Mehli Mehta was still conducting the National Youth Orchestra at age 89...."I consider myself a better musician as I get older." Mary Facano, as noted in the PBS special on aging, received her degree from Harvard at age 89. It has recently been shown that there is minimal loss of brain tissue in the cerebral cortex of a 90 year old brain, the area responsible for higher brain functions like creative thinking.

Cornelius van de Steeg, of Perry, Iowa practiced law until 1991, when he retired at the age of 101 years old. According to her friends, Jeanne Calment of Arles, France regularly rode he bicycle until the age of 100. She later died at age 120. In 1991, Dexter Woodford of Akron, Ohio swam around the island of Manhattan age the age of 77.

With examples such as these, it becomes increasingly more clear that successful aging has much to do with attitude and having a passion for life. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Just keep in mind the "possibility" of living well into the New Age... and beyond.

"Brain Derived Growth Factor" is produced by the brain to protect neurons and assist in the regrowth of brain tissue. This natural agent can be increased by exercise. ***In other words, exercise and mental stimulation can improve brain function at any age.***

However, the picture of chronic stress causing permanently damaged memory cells in the brain may seem quite bleak...but take heart. According to Gerald Edelman, Director of the Neurosciences Center of the Scripps Research Institute, it is possible for an older, damaged brain to sprout new neuronal synapses (connections between neurons in the brain). Old wisdom told us that cells in the central nervous system...brain cells...could never regrow. PET scans now reveal that new nerve cells can sprout in the brain, given the right conditionsnutrients, exercise (oxygen), determination (one of those indefinables) and stimulation. Perhaps it's never too late to spark a fuzzy brain into creative new vistas.

Life-Style Issues In Dealing With Stress and Living "Forever"

Now that you've become sufficiently curious (or concerned) what do the great sages say about living "forever." What are the various antidotes to the stresses and strains of everyday life? How does one maximize the quality of one's life? How does one live a life that feels joyful and fulfilling.....not to mention "eternal?" Let's begin a journey of

possibilities exploring all sorts of useful options for enhancing the quality of your life, and very probably extending your time on this earth plane. There's nothing to lose, right?

Just as the body has a "stress response" to rapidly mobilize our body into action and save our life, it has a "relaxation response" to protect our health. The Eagles famous musical hit of a few years ago was titled, "Learn to Be Still." They didn't invent the theme of inner "stillness," however. It has been at the core of every mystical and spiritual tradition since the dawn of humankind. There are many pathways to experiencing the wisdom of "stillness." Most have withstood the test of timethousands of years, in fact. ...and have been called by many names: Inner Contemplation, Meditation, Relaxation Response, Mindfulness Practice, Prayer, etc.

Harry Truman, while President during the last stages of World War Two, used to take regular breaks to his quiet place within. He called it the "foxhole of my mind." During this time of inner contemplation, he gave explicit instructions that he was not to be disturbed, except for a national emergency. He knew that a daily period of stillness was required to dissipate the "noise" of his mind. The ancient sages said that "silence is the fence around wisdom." Yet, there were skeptics. Dunne once quipped that "meditation is a gift confined to unknown philosophers and cows."

One effect of quietly sitting is to eventually realize that our thoughts can be dispassionately observed, with no intention of changing or improving anything. We can then become aware that our thoughts are mere patterns, fleeting electro-chemical impulses. It becomes more apparent that we are **not** our thoughts! Our true identity is not determined by what we think....or how we think. Our thoughts are only thoughts. They are ephemeral. They are NOT who we are. That is a revelation for many. The result of this realization can be more inner peace, better relationships, more effective functioning and a greater degree of happiness. That's not such a bad goal, even for those who wish only an average life span.

Separate studies at Britain's Meru Research Institute, however, suggest that meditation can slow the aging process. Michael Toomey and his research associates found that meditators scored an average of seven years younger than their chronological ages when tested for hearing, visual acuity, and systolic blood pressure. At the same research institute, it was found that the longer a person meditates, the higher their scores will be in motor speed, creativity, and visual memory. Most forms of meditation require patience and determination, especially for those of us schooled in the art of instant gratification. (For the novice, just try focusing on a body sensation, such as one's breath, for ten seconds without an intrusive thought). Yet this fascinating technique has persisted for 2500 years. It is worthy of some effort. It is a proven anti-aging strategy.

"Inside myself is a place where I live all alone and that's where you renew your Springs that never dry up."Pearl Buck

A fail-proof method of starting to meditate is the following:

- 1) Sit on a chair, with your feet touching the floor and your spine straight.
- 2) Give yourself permission to have 10 uninterrupted minutes....no need to do anything for that special time, no matter how tempting it may be.

- 3) Breathe through your nose, preferably, and count your breaths....one for inhale, two for exhale, three for inhale, four for exhale....then start over
- 4) At the same time you are counting, focus on the sensation of air coming into your nasal cavity, going deep into your lungs....and the feeling of air moving back through your nose. Really feel all the subtle sensations of air moving in and out of your body.
- 5) Understand up front that your mind is a "playful monkey" and constantly wanders. When you become aware that your mind has wandered, which it will, gently and lovingly bring it back to your breath. This will happen repeatedly. It is a part of meditation.
- 6) Make no judgments about your mind losing focus or how you are doing...abandon all thought about accomplishing anything .congratulate yourself for sitting and doing something new. Benefit generally occurs after daily practice of a few months.

Another "sure-fire" relaxation technique for dealing with the turbulence of everyday life is a variation of Jacobson's "progressive relaxation" and the Spiegel eye roll method. This technique can be learned quite rapidly and its benefits can be felt almost immediately.

- 1) Sit comfortably in a chair, with your head and body totally supported.
- 2) Once again, give yourself permission to take 5 or 10 uninterrupted minutes
- 3) Close your eyes and take 4 or 5 deep breaths, feeling your belly expand with deep breath. Try to avoid chest breathing, which promotes tension.
- 4) Then take a deep breath and hold it. At the same time, clench both fists very tight and roll your eyeballs upwards, as though looking at the top of your forehead. (Your eyes are still closed but your eyeballs are rolled upwards)
- 5) After holding your breath for a short while, suddenly release your breath, your eyes and your fists at the same time. And then FEEL the rebound relaxation.
- 6) Repeat this procedure after a few minutes, but this time, tensing your fists and your arms at the same time. You can repeat this once more, but tensing your upper arms and chest instead of your fists. Each time, you will feel more relaxed and comfortable.
- 7) Enjoy the feelings of relaxation that you've produced!

Hanging on my wall is a poster from the guru which says, "Don't just do something....Sit there!" There's much to be said about learning to "do nothing." For those who become more agitated at the thought of doing nothing, the following suggestions might be more palatable. To help you relax and befriend your body...the body that will carry you into the centenarian age.... try the following:

- Take an occasional time out and watch a funny video.....Candid Camera is a good start
- Get a regular massage
- Take a hot bath while listening to soothing music.....focus on the music and calming sensations of warm water touching your skin
- Go for a brisk hike....focus on the sights of nature....briefly note your thoughts, but go back to focusing on the beauty around you.
- Make a paper airplane and fly it across the room.....repeat.
- In a "gratitude notebook" write down everything during the past week that's been positive.....that you can feel thankful about.
- Get a small rebounder (mini trampoline) and bounce on it for five minutes.
- Shout at and criticize everyone you meet for the next two days. It will feel good when you stop. (kidding!)
- Take ten minutes to read a joke book or favorite cartoon book. Have two or three handy.
- Vigorously shake your hands and arms for twenty seconds

Thanks to Roger Rosenblatt, an essayist for Time Magazine, there are some **general rules** for living a more stress-free life. These rules usually become easier to follow as one "ripens" with age...as one attains that wisdom that can only come with life experience, right?

Rule #1) **Always be aware that things just don't matter.** Whatever you think matters, doesn't. It just doesn't matter if you're having a bad day at work, or you're having a terrible traffic day, or you catch a cold before your vacation. As a noted cardiologist says, "Don't sweat the small stuff...and it's all small stuff." The "stuff" of our lives is really very insignificant.

Rule #2) **Nobody is thinking about you.** Your neighbors aren't plotting to TP your house; your mail carrier isn't spreading rumors about you; the checkout person at the grocery store isn't snickering at your purchases. Really! No one is thinking about you. They are thinking about themselves, just like you.

Rule #3) **Give honest, frank, and open criticism to nobody, never.** A friend, spouse, or colleague has a few behavior flaws that anyone can see but themselves. And you just know that once the flaw is candidly and openly pointed out, church bells will ring, you will be exalted and that "friend" will be forever indebted to you, right? Wrong, wrong. Forget it! In that case alone, you will be thought about.....with hostile fury.

Rule #4) **At point some in life (age 50, perhaps) stop trying to focus on your weak points.** If you don't sing well, forget singing lessons. If you've been a poor athlete, forget tennis lessons. Attempting to strengthen a weakness

lives. The "**low well-being**" group had numerous psychosomatic complaints, including insomnia, broken sleep, fatigue, feeling fat, digestive problems, high blood pressure, and irritability. They were not a thriving group. They were angry a great deal of the time. They felt cheated in their lives.

When actually compared with levels of career success, however, the groups were the same. They were also the same in terms of financial wealth. Both had the same degree of career failures. Then what made the difference between the happiest and the unhappiest Harvard groups?

"The comfort of mature love was the single most important determinant of the older men's outlook on life." Over 90% of the happiest men in the study claimed to still be in love with their wives. They had even become closer after the children left the nest. By contrast, only 50% of the unhappiest men had an intimate relationship. Other important factors that determined levels of personal happiness included a "continued excitement about life and having productive work beyond the retirement years."

The happier men reached out, extended themselves, helped to make the world a better place. The unhappiest men were more self-preoccupied. They saw their previous failures as devastating indictments, while the happier men saw similar failures as stepping-stones and lessons to be learned. There's nothing like perspective, right?

The good news is that a healthier outlook...a healthier perspective on life events...can be learned. If you're open to looking at yourself and growing, there's no greater instructor/instructress than a committed relationship. A mirror will be held up to you constantly. That's not always easy, however. Remember the scene in "The Man From La Mancha," when Cervantes' hero, Don Quixote, could not withstand the scrutiny of mirrors held up to his behavior?

"In marriage, the beginning and the end are wonderful, but the middle part is hell"Enid Bagnold

The "hell" of honest confrontation can be growth-enhancing, indeed. There's a spiritual axiom that states, "your spouse is your God." Not to be taken literally, this means that one's significant other has enormous potential to give you honest feedback to help you evolve into a better human being. In fact, a loving relationship requires this honest reflection. When the feedback comes from love and the intention is to preserve the integrity of the relationship, it can be sensed. It's more acceptable. When feedback is given for non-loving reasons, the response won't be very welcoming. George Nathan was once remarked that "impersonal criticism is like an impersonal fist fight or an impersonal marriage, and as successful."

The capacity to form strong, enduring social bonds is a most important aspect of most "centenarians." As social animals, our entire System...mind, body, and spirit... is in a state of harmony when we have friends and family around us. According to Larry Scherwitz, a University of California psychologist, men who are **self-involved** rather than **other-involved** are more likely to have heart disease. He concluded this after studying over six hundred men and the patterns of speech

that they used. A sincere interest and compassion for others are key ingredients in having a long life. Friendship and social connectedness are elixirs for health and happiness.

"Mighty proud I am that I am able to have a spare bed for my friends."

....Samuel Pepys

Just as there are "nourishing" people in one's life that get your hormones dancing and singing, there are "toxic" people who don't. As Baby Boomers mature and move upwards on the evolutionary scale...i.e. grow in wisdom and the capacity to give and receive love...they can become more discerning about friendships.

As Louise Beal puts it, **"Love thy neighbor as thyself, but choose your neighborhood."** There's a degree of self love involved in the process of changing one's circle of friends. We can't help but attract to us the quality of friends that vibrate at our own frequency. That is, we attract friends at our own level of self-esteem.

Lana W. was in a troubled marriage. Despite years of effort, the serious problems were not resolved. One night she "asked God" to give her a message about the direction in which her life was headed. In the morning as she was awakening, she saw the word "CANCER" imprinted on her forehead. She said to herself, "No way...I want to see my kids grow up!" She got a divorce.

Sometimes one has to take a difficult step in the journey towards freedom. That fearful step requires both courage and trust. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, we abhor disconnection and aloneness. At times, however, a painful vulnerability has to occur before we can move ahead with our lives.

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What are the ingredients in a successful marriage?

- 1) **It's either win-win or lose-lose:** There's no such thing as a winner and a loser in relationships. Keep in mind that a relationship is a unity consisting of two separate hearts. If there's the appearance of a single winner in any dynamic duo, there's going to be resentment in the other party. It may not be obvious, but it's there. That resentment will always find a way back to the "winner," either directly or indirectly. It's called "karmic law." What goes around, comes around. The resentment may even show up as a reduction in love or passion. Therefore, there was no real "winner." It was really a "lose-lose" situation.

- 2) **Be like the "wise bamboo"....Bend:** This ancient Chinese saying contains a great deal of wisdom in the art of relationships. Only a flexible bamboo can sway with the heavy winds. A rigid bamboo will snap. It has no give. Likewise, having an inflexible, strong-willed approach to relationship issues will create weakness and vulnerability. Samuel Butler once said that "Silence is not always tact and it is tact that is golden, not silence." Respecting the pride and feelings of your partner will always pay off. Sometimes it's just best to "humor" your spouse and back off. Always keep your relationship

at a higher priority than a false sense of "victory."

- 3) **Keep your partner "special":** Never stop reminding your partner how special and important he/she is to you. **Ned R. found the woman he wanted to spend his life with. They decided to take their vows in the spiritual splendor of Machu Pichu, Peru, the Inca city in the sky. Following the Inca ceremony they remarried twice more in two separate religious ceremonies.**

There's nothing like a spontaneous "surprise" to keep a relationship invigorated. Use your imagination. Renew your marriage vows every five years. Choose a creative site and ceremony. Your relationship needs continuous nourishment, no less than your garden requires constant pruning, watering, weeding, and fertilizing. Consider a regular afternoon and evening each week to spend together...your **special** time. Making your marriage a priority in this manner will pay rich dividends.

- 4) **Have a "life" outside of your marriage:** As Gibran has written in "The Prophet" over 500 years ago, "let your marriage be like two pillars in the Temple, strong but far enough apart so the wind can blow between them." Have friends and hobbies outside of your marriage as well as within it. . This will stimulate your marriage and bring novelty and freshness to your lives. Healthy "flirting" is one key to staying forever young . It's part of our nature. This is definitely to be done with one's partner, but not necessarily. Flirting doesn't require going all the way. Ask any happily married Elder. It keeps the heart young and the juices flowing.
- 5) **Strive to learn new things together:** Seek to find mutual interests and learn new things as a couple. Become adventure seekers, wherever your whims take you to the four corners of your state or the four corners of your planet. **"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning is young."Henry Ford**
- 6) **Have lots of sex:** No one is ever too old to forego the pleasures of intimacy. It often gets better with age. Sex may not prevent pregnancy, but it often prevents migraines, insomnia, aches and pains, and frustration. It is an excellent sedative as well as an enhancement of the endocrine system. Sex is an inexpensive anti-depressant and source of harmonious bonding throughout one's life. It's definitely best to strive for the "hereafter" with your boots on.

As relationships evolve into the next millennium, we're likely to see some creative ways to reconcile very long lives ---immortality perhaps---and our accustomed patterns of marriage. There seems to be no question that mature love is a core ingredient in happy, healthy lives. And this requires lots of stress, strain and life experience. Mature love and intimacy isn't so easy to attain.

However, what if our spouse lives as long we do? Is that a pleasant or an unpleasant thought for upcoming centenarians (age 100 and beyond)? Are we programmed in our DNA to pair-bond one time? Some futurists have suggested that there will be serial marriages for various stages on one's life. One spouse might be best for raising children....another might be better suited for the "empty-nest years"....another for the years that are described as the "gateway" to older age, and beyond. That might sound contradictory and cynical to many. But futurists are a funny breed. They like to stir controversy.

Men and women have different responses to marriage in the later years. Most research indicates that older **men** definitely live longer and are healthier if they are married. The evidence isn't so clear that **women** derive the same benefits. In our culture, women have been more programmed to be caretakers. Could it be that that men receive more nourishment than they give? Men are definitely getting better at caretaking and sharing home responsibilities. The data seems to indicate, however, that women live equally healthy and long lives whether or not they are married. So, what's the answer? Let's check with the futurists for some "non-answers." It's a little like a Zen koan (What's the sound of one hand clapping?). The answer isn't as important as learning about the question.

David Brown's prescription for an extended, happy life-time:

If you can, fall in love again...If you can, regularly experience excitement...If you can, a touch of "danger" now and again could be nice...If you can, visit your old home...If you can, have lunch with an old flame (innocent but stimulating)...If you can, live in Paris for 6 months...If you can, start college or finish it...If you can, do something life-changing for a person or family in need without their knowing you did it...If you can learn to play the piano or guitar...If you can, buy a painting you love...Never retire...Listen to your body and worship it...If you can, get married!

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