

AGING HORIZONS BULLETIN

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Legacy: Retired Canadians Open Preschools in Guatemala

Study: Seniors Put Their Cards On the Table

Interview: Boomers Change the Way We Grow Old

New Book: Will You Still Love Me When I'm 94?

Roundup

- Homecare Workers Deserve Better
- Improving Service Access for Older Immigrants
- Airports Help Travelers With Dementia
- Betty Freidan on Old Age

Legacy: Retired Canadians Open Preschools in Guatemala

Susan and Richard Schmaltz arrived in Guatemala in 1999. Richard had served as a school principal for more than 25 years in Ottawa, Canada. A specialist in early childhood education, Susan worked as a teacher, founded two preschool programs and taught at the college level. With their children in university, the couple took early retirement.



Past age 50, Susan and Richard Schmaltz began the work they were born to do.

AHB reached Susan Schmaltz in Ottawa.

Ruth Dempsey: When did you start your early childhood program?

Susan Schmaltz: In January 2001, we opened our first classroom to 15 children. They didn't speak a word of English and I didn't speak a word of Spanish. It was the experience of a lifetime. Language was never an issue.

RD: Where did the name *Planting Seeds* come from?

SS: I have always thought of a school as a garden. It is a space of growth and beauty, where caring individuals nurture the young, helping them to become all they may become: physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

RD: How do the children learn?

SS: The children learn through play, engaging and interacting with the world around them. Each child progresses at their own pace. Teachers create hands-on learning activities that students use to develop strong critical and problem-solving skills and to learn how to get along with others. The teacher works as a guide and facilitator.

Primarily, we serve children of Mayan decent, who are raised in extreme poverty. The curriculum nourishes pride in their identity and culture. For example, the teacher might set up a traditional Guatemalan market in the classroom where the children learn about popular foods. Cuisine is central to a host of fascinating Mayan customs and ceremonies that children role play at the centre.

RD: This teaching approach requires lots of materials. How do you manage?

SS: With a limited budget, we decided we would have to design and build our own classroom furniture. Building projects include reading lofts made from bamboo poles;

sand and water tables; paint easels and child-sized furniture for the various roles; and play areas.

Construction teams come from across Canada and the United States. About 20 volunteers, aged 13 to 80, come for a month each year. The quality of the furniture is amazing. The team includes a few skilled carpenters. The rest come from every imaginable walk of life.



This saves us thousands of dollars, not to mention the satisfaction volunteers derive from the experience. I have seen grown men cry on seeing children happily rocking on the wooden horse or playing in the sandbox that they created with their own hands.

RD: What about classroom space and funds to pay salaries?

SS: Over time, our program morphed into two partner NGOs, *Oeness Through Service Guatemala* (Canada) and our partner *Planando Semillas* (Guatemala). To date, all the money to operate *Oeness* has been raised through family and friends. We pay some of the teacher salaries and some are paid by our partner organizations.

For example, in Guatemala City, we partnered with a well-known American NGO called *Camino Seguro*. They invited us to set up two preschool classrooms and, later, a six-room daycare. *Camino Seguro* provided the space and teacher salaries. We designed the programs, trained the teachers and provided learning materials and supplies.

Ten years ago, we built a new preschool in the mountain village of Sacala. *Rotary International* funded the construction of a second preschool in the neighbouring village of Tioxya. *Oeness* funded both programs, including the salaries.

RD: How are teachers trained?

SS: For several years, I trained the teachers using a translator Madeli Quinones, who was my Spanish teacher when I first went to Guatemala. She was also the first teacher I trained in the *Planting Seeds* methodology. Eventually, we became co-trainers. With support from *Oeness*, Madeli attended Rafael Landívar University, graduating with a gold medal from the master's program in Early Childhood Education. Currently, she is president of the Guatemalan Early Childhood Education Association and executive director of *Plantando Semillas*.

For years, Richard and I dreamed of establishing a teacher education facility to ensure the *Planting Seeds* methodology continued to thrive long after our departure. But where to find the funds? Then, unbelievably, we learned that Allan Leboldus, an Edmonton dentist had left \$250,000 in his will to enable us to carry on our work. His wife, a former teacher,

had died some years earlier. Each year, Dr. Leboldus sent us a generous gift in her memory.

In 2013, thanks to this amazing gift, we were able to put in place a long-term program dedicated to the formation of teachers. To date, we have trained over 130 teachers in the *Planting Seeds* methodology.

RD: This educational approach is now approved for use in the Guatemalan public school system. Is that right?

SS: Yes. Five years ago, the government of Guatemala introduced an accreditation system based on a number of criteria. About 30 organizations won accreditation in the first year. When we received our official papers from the Ministry of Education, we were surprised to find the *Planting Seeds* methodology had been approved for use up to Grade 6 anywhere in Guatemala. Needless to say, we were delighted.

RD: Oneness also sponsors an annual teacher conference . . .

SS: That's right. Each year we offer the conference in a different city or village, attracting over 100 participants from area public schools. *Planting Seeds* educators engage participants in a series of hands-on workshops. Teachers always want more inservice, but funds are limited.

RD: Today, the program operates at 20 different sites, including Guatemala City, San Lucas and several remote mountain villages. How involved are parents and the community?

SS: Parents have played a significant role in many of the schools: becoming members of the board of directors; donating land for school use; and helping to construct school buildings.

Some assist teachers in the classroom, accompany them on field trips and clean classrooms at the end of the day.



Parents serve a breakfast and prepare daily snacks for students.

In these poorer communities, parent involvement is vital for the quality and sustainability of programs. For example, in Sacala Las Lomas, where we were unable to purchase land, one family allowed us to build a community school on their land. And while the school was under construction, they allowed us to use their one-room house for 15 preschool children.

Since its inception, over 1,200 children have attended the *Planting Seeds* program with an attendance rate topping 95 per cent.

RD: Lately, you have passed the baton on to a new generation . . .

SS: Yes, in May 2017, Richard and I officially passed the torch to two committed and inspiring young people: Shannon Moyle from Ottawa (Canada) and Maclane Phillips from Chicago (U.S.A.). Their dream is to raise funds to extend the program to include a strong parent education component. The program is now known as [*Planting Seeds International*](#).

RD: So, 18 years on, what has it all meant?

SS: The experience has been fulfilling beyond anything that we could have imagined. This was not the retirement we dreamed of, but looking back, we cannot now imagine our lives without this piece. The experience has been transformative on so many levels.

First, working with some of the poorest of the poor in Guatemala has been a life-changing experience. The stress and concerns of our own lives fall away before the beauty and simplicity of theirs.

As we know, each country's hopes rests with the young. If children are taught from their earliest years to love themselves and care for others, change is possible.

Certainly, we hope some of the seeds we have planted will bear fruit. In time, we are confident that the young people of Guatemala will spin their own magic, forging a way forward in freedom, peace and love.

Study: Seniors Put Their Cards On the Table

For 10 days in July, thousands swamped the Toronto Convention Centre. Mostly older adults, they had come to Toronto for the 2017 North American Bridge Championships.

So it is no surprise that new Canadian research finds playing cards is a favourite leisure activity among older adults.

The study found that 73 per cent of older adults play non-digital games, such as cards, surpassing the 53 per cent who play digital games. The research was led by Ben Mortenson of the department of occupational science and occupational therapy at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

The findings, published online in the *Canadian Journal on Aging* (June 22, 2017), draw on data from a large cross-sectional survey, looking at patterns of digital and non-digital game-playing among older adults. Researchers recruited individuals over the age of 55

from shopping malls, residential facilities, seniors' centres and community centres within the Greater Vancouver area.

The present study draws on data from 648 respondents, who answered questions about non-digital games. Respondents included 412 females and 236 males.

Popular games

Survey results show 65 per cent of respondents enjoy playing cards.

Other popular games, include:

- board games, such as scrabble, chess and checkers
- puzzles like crossword, Sudoku and jigsaw, and
- gambling, including slots, bingo and poker.

Ten per cent play Yahtzee, a popular dice game.

Interestingly, the new study reveals only four per cent of participants play sports or physical games, such as snooker, curling or bowling.

Benefits abound

First and foremost, older adults play for the fun and enjoyment.

Additionally, nearly 80 per cent play to stay mentally sharp. This was especially important as people age and among people with higher education.

More than 70 per cent of participants enjoy the social nature of non-digital games. Most play with family, friends or members of a club. About 10 per cent play for longer than four hours at a time, while about half play less than an hour at a time.

Only 26 per cent of participants play for escape from daily life.

Lately, digital games have grabbed the research limelight, but Mortenson and colleagues say the current study emphasizes the importance of non-digital games to enhance social interaction and quality of life among older adults.

Clearly, the five thousand card-loving bridge players that crowded into the Toronto Convention Centre this summer, agree. As one player told CBC's *The National*: "You have to put so much mental energy into playing bridge. It's like having a marathon for your body."

Interview: Boomers Change the Way We Grow Old

A British sociologist paints a vivid picture of the first wave of baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1955. She provides a penetrating look at how the 1960s influenced the postwar generation and shaped their view of old age.



*In **Baby Boomers: Time and Ageing Bodies**, Naomi Woodspring, a research fellow at University of the West of England, writes boomers are changing how we grow old. They are focused on contributing a legacy for younger generations.*

*To learn more, **AHB** reached Dr. Woodspring in Bristol, England.*

Ruth Dempsey: This is a theme close to your own heart . . .

Naomi Woodspring: Indeed. As an American, born in the first wave of the postwar generation, I came to this research as both an outsider and insider. I am an immigrant to the United Kingdom, and I was an acid-taking, commune-living activist and a '60s hippie.

RD: Drawing on interviews with a diverse group of individuals, your book discusses how boomers inherited a changed world, and how it has influenced their journey through life.

NW: That's right. The '60s in the United States was different than in the United Kingdom. For one thing, the United Kingdom did not have the Vietnam War and a draft that galvanized young Americans.

Worldwide, many social and cultural factors affected how the '60s played out from Mexico to India. Each country had its own influences and particular flavour.

That said, there was also a collective sense of the period. Music was central to the '60s. It conveyed the generation's sense of fun, their hopes and fears. So the music became my starting point. As I interviewed people, it became clear to me that it was the influence of the '60s that was important.

But that was only the beginning. Other changes during the period had little to do with whether you grew your hair long, wore a bra, rode a Vespa, or made free love. Take legislation that loosened the censorship laws and abolished capital punishment. Divorce laws were reformed and abortion legalized.

The Church of England assumed a more liberal position in some of its attitudes. Laws on homosexuality were reformed. The arrival of the Pill decoupled sex and procreation. And the founding of the National Health Service ensured healthcare for all. These were fundamental changes that affected everyone.

Fear of nuclear war haunted the postwar generation. They were also the first to glimpse Earthrise, a visceral reminder that we are all citizens of one planet.

I could go on, but you get the general drift. These changes did not mushroom up out of nowhere. They are part of a long trajectory of history. Consider Mary Wollstonecraft and her discussions of free love. Add to this, ideas from the Romantic era, the Utopian movements and the Golden Age Twenties, among others.

So a number of elements went into making the '60s. As with all generations, there was an intergenerational exchange. That exchange was a blending of historic events, ideas and the choices made by the postwar generation.

Fast forward 40 years, and the influence of the '60s lingers, offering this group a strong sense of identity and shaping how they approach old age.

RD: Earthrise offered promise of collective action and peace. What do you say to those who claim boomers failed to live up to their promise?

NW: What promise? We are leaving a legacy that another world is possible. We have pushed this notion farther than it has been pushed in the past. As American social critic Michael Parenti points out, the rich and powerful will always protect the rich and powerful. Today, many of the postwar generation continue to address equity and social justice issues.

In fact, this was a recurring theme in the interviews. Regardless of where participants were on the political spectrum, they discussed the need for change.

Also, I see the generations after us stepping forward and taking over from us. This is our legacy.

RD: What does aging feel like for your interviewees?

NW: Ah, what does aging feel like? That is an impossible question. It is like asking what the water feels like in a flotation tank. It feels like *life*.

Certainly, participants are profoundly aware that they have lived more years than they have left to live. For the most part, individuals expressed acceptance of their aging body. "I look my years," was a common refrain.

Most are physically active, including those with chronic health problems. This group enjoys physical activity. At various points in their lives, they were gardeners, cyclists, walkers or golfers. Some are runners, others take gym classes. As Gill put it, "I want to feel good in my body."

RD: How has watching their parents age, affected them?

NW: Most of the participants envision a different kind of old age for themselves. Times change. As one participant observed, "People [were] dying at 70 — now we're still working, we've got lots of things to do, lots of hobbies and we're a totally different generation."

RD: With longer life expectancies, boomers are confronting new challenges.

NW: I would say that longevity has allowed these participants to imagine a different kind of aging. A majority of working-class people in my study had already lived longer than family members of previous generations.

Rather than talking about life being over, interviewees used the language of "becoming." As one participant put it, "I'm still very much becoming. This is quite an exciting time for me — it can be stressful but I do feel like I'm becoming."

RD: What about worries?

NW: Many talked about the state of the world, especially the challenges facing next generations. They discussed the economy, climate change, wealth disparity and the dominance of banks and corporations on society.

Of course, they had personal worries, too. Concerns about their ability to remain independent. No longer being able to do the things they love. Some discussed their fear of death.

At the same time, they expressed a sense of fun, laughing at themselves, at their pasts and at their sagging bodies.

RD: What do they find most satisfying about who they are today?

NW: That's a difficult question. Everyone, in one way or another, appeared to be living large. Perhaps, that was what I found most notable: a sense of satisfaction that showed up in a "full-of-lifeness."

RD: Participants talked about leaving a legacy. Can you give me an example?

NW: Oh my, there are so many examples from what I call conscious grandparenting to launching new businesses based on sustainability to mentoring to pursuing political activism.

RD: What surprised you?

NW: I was struck by similarities in the group. Interviewees came from different social classes, genders, sexual orientations, racial and ethnic groups and from all points on the political spectrum, yet the similarities were striking. These people have developed a potent sense of themselves as a generation.

They reject the media hype of a war between generations. Indeed, several are interested in community-based initiatives that bridge the generations. This may be why so many were willing to take part in the study. Researchers struggle to find a diverse group of people to interview. But I had to turn people down. My sense is that they want to tell their own story.

Over 40 years ago, Maggie Kuhn noted, "Few people know how to be old." Perhaps this still holds true today. Participants in this study said they had few role models for the sort of aging they are now experiencing. There is very little research on this generation that is not speculative. Part of my original intent was to show people of my generation that they are not alone in the ways they are living and thinking about age.



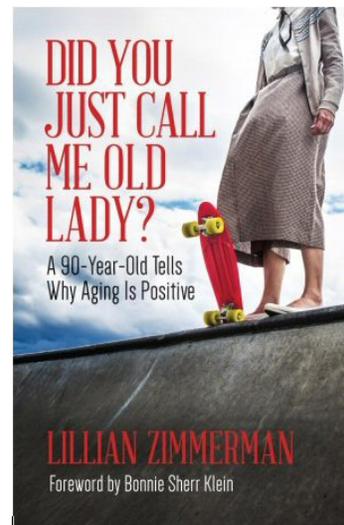
Becoming old opens up new possibilities, new ways of being in the world. Not one person, I interviewed showed any interest in settling into a quiet old age. This was surprising. In this last phase of their lives, they want to create a legacy — through active social and cultural engagement.

New Book: Will You Still Love Me When I'm 94?

Life has changed for those in their older age since the Beatles crooned their song "When I'm Sixty Four" in the 1960s. *Did You Just Call Me Old Lady?* looks at the changing landscape.

Author 90-year-old Lillian Zimmerman is a mother and grandmother. She became a single mother in the 1960s, when her husband, a Canadian army veteran died at the age of 41. Until her retirement, Zimmerman was a research associate at the Gerontology Research Centre at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

Above all, *Did You Just Call Me Old Lady?* is a summons to recognize old people as contributors, not burdens. With warmth and wisdom, Zimmerman challenges the ageist assumptions and stereotypes rampant in society.



The slender volume is organized into nine chapters, each upbeat, well-researched and filled with examples.

In the fourth chapter, she examines Canadian medicare, debunking the idea an aging population will break the health system's bank. Zimmerman provides a plethora of research to illustrate her point.

The fifth chapter details the immense contribution older Canadians make to society through volunteering, charitable donations and caregiving. Research estimates informal caregivers, age 45 and older, provide approximately \$25 billion of care yearly to older adults living in the community.

In the sixth chapter, Zimmerman looks at the changing face of work and retirement. To start, retirement has fading appeal for an increasing number of working-age Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, the participation rate for those 65 and older more than doubled — from six per cent in 1996 to 14 per cent in 2016. The author discusses specific elements, that can diminish, sustain or enhance older adults' work experiences.

In a concluding chapter, Zimmerman shares some of the things she loves about being old.

Among them:

- a greater sense of self-confidence
- better ability to make decisions
- no pressure to compete, and
- strong friendships with older women friends and her grown grandchildren.

On the downside, she has experienced some memory loss. She finds getting a good night's sleep is more difficult. And she mourns the loss of family and friends to death.

Perhaps only when we know our time is limited do we properly treasure it. The author likens this realization to being in love: "everything seems more vivid and intense."

This is an invaluable read, offering a far-ranging look at what one 90-year-old has learned with age. Older adults will find it uplifting and informative. *Did you Just Call Me Old Lady?* is a must read for policy makers and for those who work with old people.

Roundup

HEMOCARE WORKERS DESERVE BETTER: Homecare workers are poorly paid and undervalued.

The low pay and poor working conditions are permissible because the workforce is largely female and working class, according to Lydia Hayes, lecturer in law at Cardiff University, in Cardiff, Wales.

Hayes interviewed 30 U.K. homecare workers for her compelling new book [*Stories of Care: a Labour of Law*](#). Many dedicated individuals are drawn to homecare by a desire to make a difference. On the one hand, they find the work hugely satisfying. On the other, they face staggering workloads and feel undervalued.

As in Canada, worker turnover is high in the United Kingdom. More than a third of workers leave their jobs each year.

Stories of Care provides a blistering critique of employment law applied to homecare and other types of gendered employment. Hayes focuses on four main areas:

- low wages, where workers believe they are paid less because they are mostly women
- job insecurity
- rewards of homecare work, and
- low worker control.

According to Hayes, these women are victims of a process of *institutionalized humiliation* that undermines their confidence and has a damaging effect on their lives. Furthermore, the same system underpins the failings of homecare services for older people.

So what's the solution?

To begin, labour law must be reformed to meet the needs of the 21st century. As Hayes writes, "We need to protect social care, and to respect and value care work. That means we need to make changes to labour law."

IMPROVING SERVICE ACCESS FOR OLDER IMMIGRANTS: New research finds Chinese immigrants in the United Kingdom use "bridge" people to access health and other social services.

According to the study, many older immigrants lack information about health services. Some experience language or cultural barriers. And most have limited resources.

Who are bridge people?

Bilingual and bicultural, most bridge people are Chinese. They include family, friends, public sector workers and staff from community-based Chinese organizations. Services are provided free of charge. According to the study, older adults feel safe sharing their personal information with their supporters.

So what do bridge people do?

Primarily, they:

- provide language assistance
- help with translation
- fill out application forms (one woman with mobility difficulties was unaware that she could apply for a walking frame, and receive it free of charge)
- book medical appointments
- research specific health issues
- accompany participants to hospital
- arrange transportation, and
- provide emotional and cultural support.

Powerful strategy

When they get older, many people find comfort in their own culture and language. The findings show how Chinese and other ethnic groups can use a Bridge people network to support and enhance the lives of older immigrants.

Full details of the study appeared in the March 2017 issue of *Health and Social Care in the Community*

AIRPORTS HELP TRAVELERS WITH DEMENTIA: Alzheimer's Disease International estimates close to 47 million people worldwide live with dementia today, and many still travel.

Airports are taking action.

In August 2016, London's Heathrow Airport launched a program to train its workforce, especially its security staff, to assist travellers with dementia and other disabilities. The goal is to reduce anxiety for travellers who may find security checks and crowded terminals confusing.

In December 2016, the Alzheimer Society's awarded London Gatwick airport its *Dementia Friendly Innovation Award* for its efforts to improve travel for people with disabilities. Gatwick offers passengers the option of wearing hidden disability lanyards.

The lanyards ensure staff can identify passengers, who may need assistance.

In 2017, the U.K. Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) reported the majority of the U.K.'s top 30 airports are providing "very good" or "good" support for persons with disabilities. At the same time, the CAA alerted four airports they would be monitored for improvement.

In June 2017, Brisbane Airport became Australia's first dementia-friendly airport with the launch of a special guide. ***Ensuring a Smooth Journey: A Guide to Brisbane Airport for People Living with Dementia and their Travel Companions***, grew out of a partnership between dementia advocates, the Brisbane Airport Corporation and the Queensland University of Technology.

The handy 34-page guide focuses on four key areas:

- preparing for your journey
- getting to the airport
- checking in and flying out, and
- flying into Brisbane.

Numbers show more and more people with disabilities are travelling today. In the United Kingdom alone, the number travelling by air has increased by 66 per cent since 2010.

Globally, the Alzheimer's Society and other charities are teaming up with airports to create a more comfortable airport experience for passengers with special needs.

BETTY FREIDAN ON OLD AGE: At 60, the author of *The Feminine Mystique* began research for her book on old age. Over the next 12 years, she interviewed scores of older adults and distilled findings from gerontologists, psychologists and social scientists.

In *The Fountain of Age*, published in 1993, she writes:

We have barely even considered the possibilities of age for new kinds of loving intimacy, purposeful work and activity, learning and knowing, community and care . . . for to see age as continued human development involves a revolutionary paradigm shift.