Aging Gracefully

A Behavior Analytic View

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with Ken Stephens

How people view aging usually depends upon their particular age. Adolescents often wish they were older, and young adults don’t seem to mind turning thirty. But by the time people have reached forty, they have often begun the long search for ways to reverse, slow, or delay the aging process. They earnestly start exercise programs, shop for healthier foods, take vitamins, and buy youthful clothing and expensive facial creams. While these steps are useful and can have desirable effects, they do not provide a strategy for dealing with the ultimate changes—such as forgetfulness, reduced strength, the loss of a friend—associated with aging. A different kind of approach is needed.

To date, behavior analysis offers the most practical and effective plan of attack. By viewing the inevitable changes brought on by age as problems to be solved, behavior analysis provides an honest appraisal of the changes and offers deliberate strategies to offset them. While behavior analysis can offer little help in terms of physical aging, it can help you find ways to lead a more productive, happier life—regardless of your physical condition. The key is to remain active. For it is only in doing that you experience consequences, and it is the consequences of doing that leads to a fuller, more enjoyable life.

The following areas offer practical advice to help you age gracefully:

- A Little Background
- Turning Words into Action
- Getting Along in the World
- Getting Along with People
- Changing How You Feel
- Remaining Physically Active
- Remaining Intellectually Active
- Enjoying the Day
- Preparing for the End of Life

A Little Background

The suggestions that follow are based on the science called behavior analysis. This science follows in the tradition of other natural sciences. Thus, it begins with the basic assumption that behavior is lawful and orderly. Using the scientific method, researchers study the behavior of a host of organisms to uncover the lawful relations between behavior and the conditions under which it occurs. Such an approach provides an objective understanding of behavior because the conditions studied—the setting and consequences of a particular behavior—are observable and measurable.

“Almost all our major problems involve human behavior, and they cannot be solved by physical and biological technology alone. What is needed is a technology of behavior...”  

B.F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity [1971]
Put simply, behavior analysts study the relation between behavior and its environment. The wealth of data collected during much of the last century gives strong support to the notion that behavior is largely determined by its environment. More specifically, it has become increasingly clear that the consequences of behavior are responsible in large part for what we do and why we do it. In other words, we act as we do because of what happens when we do it. The following pages on aging are written in this spirit. While the perspective and the findings of behavior analysis have been borrowed for the purposes of analyzing the problems of aging, its technical terms have been avoided.

For those of you who are interested in learning more about the foundations of this science, there is information right here at the Cambridge Center behavior.org site. For example, see Howard Sloane’s page “What is behavior analysis?” There are also many other behavioral sites on the Web, including the Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior and the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. You may also be interested in visiting the web page for the Association for Behavior Analysis International. In addition, there are many good books on the subject. The following are just a few:

- Catania, A. C. Learning, 4th Ed. Prentice-Hall.
- Mazur, J. E. Learning and Behavior, 4th Ed. Prentice-Hall.
- Staddon, J. E. R. Behaviorism. Focus Publishing.

**Turning Words into Action**

As you read through the various suggestions offered, note that many are meant to relieve discomfort and minimize the mild (and sometimes major) annoyances of everyday life—the things that lead to bad moods, anger, or sadness. Thus, if you find even one suggestion that seems especially fitting for you, try it. For in doing so, you may experience results that make you feel better. It is this effect—feeling better—that makes it more likely that: 1) you will want to do it again, and 2) you will be inclined to try yet another suggestion for a different problem. If you try all of the suggestions that are offered here that are relevant to your life, you may find that you are not only enjoying your life more, but that you are enjoying managing your life as well. For you see, managing your life is the key to adjusting to the imperfections of aging.

**Getting Along in the World**

Aging involves gradual changes in our senses and our muscles, and it is often these changes that keep us from fully enjoying the world in which we live. While there are few things that you can do to prevent these changes (perhaps a sensible diet and regular exercise can slow the process), you can redesign your world so as to minimize the inconveniences associated with them and that stand in the way of an
enjoyable life. If the suggestions given here seem to be nothing more than common sense, then please consider them to be friendly reminders. For it is all too often the case that people don't apply common-sense solutions to problems, especially problems associated with aging. Vision: Perhaps you have noticed that your night vision is less acute, or that the sunlight has grown more glaring. Often by the time a person reaches fifty, they have more difficulty finding suitable light for reading in the evening and the small print on medicine bottles becomes impossible to decipher. Fortunately, these kinds of problems can be easily solved. Appropriate glasses are a good place to start. A magnifying glass can be extremely useful if it is kept close at hand. Finding the right reading lamp is essential, but it also pays to increase the lighting throughout your home. Perhaps it is time to do a bit of home redecorating.

Hearing: Equally troublesome is the gradual loss of hearing. It is estimated that approximately thirty percent of all people over sixty experience such loss. But once again, solutions are available. Telephones can be equipped with amplifiers, TVs with “closed captioning,” and stereos with earphones. Doorbells can be purchased that activate a flashing light, and other hearing assistive technology (HAT) devices are available. Even a pet can help by letting you know that someone is at the door. Hearing aids are more effective than they used to be, but vanity often keeps people from using them. They do have their advantages, though: people tend to speak more clearly when they see someone wearing them. And you can always turn them off if you no longer wish to listen! You may also want to investigate the wide range of Assistive Listening Devices that are now available. Consider getting instruction in speechreading. Find out about telecommunication relay services that can help you continue to use the telephone even if you can't hear well. There are millions of people like you with diminished hearing, so organizations like SHHH have been formed to provide more information about hearing loss and what you can do about it–check it out!

Taste: Perhaps your doctor has advised you to cut back on salt—advice many of us have heard as a way of lowering our blood pressure. While such advice is probably prudent, it is hard to follow. Who doesn't like the taste of salt? But there are a host of spices and herbs available that can transform dishes and make you not even notice the lack of salt. For example, basil, oregano, tarragon, curry, and ginger can enhance the flavor of many different kinds of food. Look for cookbooks that take advantage of these ingredients... and then experiment.

Balance: As people age their muscles grow weaker and they experience a loss of strength due in part to an increasingly sedentary life. Bones, too, become more brittle and are more easily broken. Because of these facts, one of the greatest fears old people have is the fear of falling. It is estimated that one in three people over the age of sixty-five fall each year. If you are living alone, the problems resulting from a fall can be even more serious. Make sure you have a phone available and close at hand in every room of your house. If you have already experienced a fall in your home, then it is time to problem-solve. For example, remove the throw rugs in your house and remove all unnecessary furniture that might get in your way. Make sure electrical cords are out of the way of traffic. Make sure your home is well-lit. Find shoes that are snug on your feet; avoid slippers and shoes with higher-heels. People who spend a great deal of time walking often use walking sticks—they can be quite attractive and very useful in coordinating balance—and there is no reason why you can't do the same. It is also time, perhaps, to literally practice moving more slowly.
Getting Along with People

“If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, sir, should keep his friendship in a constant repair.” James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson [1791]

Fortunately, wisdom is a part of aging, too. And from experience, most of us have learned that getting along with others—co-workers, neighbors, and the grocer, not to mention spouses, family, and friends—makes life easier and much more enjoyable. During much of the day, getting along often means simply smiling, saying “Hello,” and being courteous. But if you are looking for healthy, long-term relationships, you will need other skills as well. Think of the people you like spending time with, or the people you find attractive, and then consider what they do that makes them so enjoyable to be around.

For instance, it is certainly more enjoyable to be around people who show an interest in the world around them. Observing the birds that visit your feeder—and noting that the robins have returned early this spring—can be the source of conversations throughout the day. Reading the daily newspaper provides a wealth of information to discuss over lunch, and reading the latest bestseller often leads to many memorable conversations. The point is that we are most attracted to people who are attractive, and being interested in life is very attractive, no matter what age.

We are also attracted to people who find us attractive. Think of the people you enjoy most. They ask about your life, seek out your opinion, show concern for your well-being, and, most important, exhibit a sensitivity to your needs and ailments. And they compliment you, too. When is the last time you paid someone a compliment?

It is true, of course, that our physical attractiveness dims as we age, but we all have seen women and men who are many years older and who are still remarkably handsome. Remaining trim helps, but choosing the right clothing for your build (and your age) helps, too. Finding an appropriate hair style can improve your appearance—as can new eye glasses. Having a photo taken of yourself at least once a year provides valuable insight into how others see you—and it may highlight things that you want to change.

One of the most endearing characteristics of a friend, however, has nothing to do with appearance. A sense of humor transcends looks and is most often mentioned by people when looking for a spouse. Being able to laugh at yourself means that you don't take life too seriously, and that feature, of course, is always attractive. An added incentive: laughter is good medicine.

It is also true that good cooks have good friends. Few things are as enjoyable as being served a delicious meal in the company of interesting people. If you find that you are seeing friends or family less often, perhaps it is time to try a new recipe and invite them to dinner.

Forsake not an old friend; for the new is not comparable to him:
a new friend is as new wine; when it is old, thou shalt drink it with pleasure.
Ecclesiasticus, 9:10

Finally, to this list of do's it is important to add a don't: Don't be in a hurry to judge the actions of others. If you have chosen your friends carefully, then withhold casual judgment on what they do. For instance, it's hard not to voice an opinion when you hear things that you disagree with, but one of the most cherished characteristics of a good friend is that he or she listens... and reserves judgment. Practice
If you are idle, be not solitary; if you are solitary, be not idle. James Boswell The Life of Samuel Johnson [1791]

listening. If your opinion is needed, you will be asked for it. Besides, how often has your opinion really changed the actions of others anyway?

Withholding judgment is also a very good idea when your feelings have been hurt. Is it possible that you have misinterpreted the situation that has led to the bad feelings? The insensitivities of others are seldom intentional. Besides, perceived slights by definition are petty and inconsequential. Do you really want to throw away a long, cherished history together because of momentary hurt feelings? Try reining in your sensitivities instead. Granted, it's not easy letting go of perceived injustices when hurt feelings are involved. But there are things you can do to help change those feelings and thus rid yourself of negative, counterproductive thoughts.

**Changing How You Feel**

Sometimes our feelings seem to be what is getting in the way of an enjoyable life. Whether we feel sad or angry or bored, our feelings seem to play a big part in what we do. Indeed, many people think that feelings are the sole causes of behavior. But we needn't stop there; why not ask what is causing the feeling? They do not occur randomly. Feelings are literally physiological reactions to things that are happening to you. In other words, feelings—and the resulting behavior—are caused by events in the world around you. Thus, if you really want to change how you feel, you will need to change the conditions that are causing the feelings.

It's not unusual to be in a funk now and then. You don't feel like doing anything so you sit in front of the television—maybe even for hours—which only adds to your blue mood. If you are really interested in changing how you feel, then you will need to get up and start moving. Go for a walk. Look at the world around you, notice the trees, the flowers, feel the sun on your face. This may be the most important advice we offer you. Walking will make you feel better. But if not walking, then at least find some activity that you enjoy doing. Go see a film, go to a museum, take a friend to lunch, or, yes, go shopping. It's easy and it's fun... and you'll feel better.

Doing something about how you feel is especially important if you are regularly experiencing a lack of interest in everything around you. This general malaise is probably the result of a number of things happening to you at the same time. You may experience something like this after you retire, for example. If you have not planned for retirement, then you may find that you no longer have a reason to rise in the morning. You may also experience a real loss as a result of no longer being affiliated with a group of people. Again, if you haven't planned for such a dramatic change in your life, you may find that you are ill equipped to handle your new life. As a result, you feel blue.

Such unpleasant feelings are red flags telling you that your environment needs to be changed. Does waking up and seeing 6:00 a.m. on the alarm clock make you unhappy because you seldom have anything to do during the day? Then solve the problem by adding to your day physical activities and intellectual activities so that you are busy throughout the day. How about a daily visit to the neighbor down the street or a daily trip to the grocery store? Perhaps, you would enjoy volunteering at the local senior-citizen center—the residents can always use the company. What about joining the local social clubs, book clubs, or cooking classes? They bring you in contact with people who have similar interests and are a great place to meet new friends. Then the thought of a new day won't be an occasion for sadness.
Unfortunately, one of the more frequent complaints of older adults is more serious than a blue mood. Feelings of sadness or emptiness probably strike all of us at one time or another, but if you are regularly experiencing sadness throughout much of the day, day after day, something needs to be done. Sometimes such feelings can be attributed to the loss of someone or something (your home, neighborhood, or standard of living), and grieving is an appropriate reaction to such loss. But there does come a time when such grieving is unhealthy and counterproductive. If your doctor has ruled out medical causes, she may recommend that you take antidepressants. But there is something else you may be able to do as well: change the conditions that are causing the feeling. First, you will need to figure out what is triggering the unpleasant feelings. Then you can either learn to systematically avoid those conditions, find a way to render them ineffective, or confront them head-on. Which strategy you use depends upon the circumstances and the outcome you desire.

If you are sad about the loss of someone you love, and you experience pangs of sadness every time you glance at the photo album that is filled with pictures of your loved one, it is time to put the album in the attic. Or, is it simply seeing the ashtray she used or her favorite chair that fills you with melancholy? Then put it away. You needn't dispose of these objects—give yourself some time for making such decisions—but do put away everything that triggers unpleasant emotions and that is keeping you living in the past. Does talking about your sadness make you sadder? Then stop talking about it. It is only by doing something different that you can experience different feelings. Avoiding triggers will help you feel better.

There are other times, however, when avoiding the trigger is not the best strategy. Consider what happens when a friend has mistreated you in some way. If you're like most people, you will do everything you can to avoid the person. Unfortunately, if you are in the same bridge club or yoga class with the individual, attempting to avoid her requires more energy (and time wasted!) than being friendly. Worse, you walk around with negative feelings. You need a different solution; you need to figure out a way of weakening her ability to trigger your emotions. Try writing to her and tactfully tell her why you are upset. You may be surprised at how much better you feel once you have had an opportunity to “get it off your chest.” The recipient of your call or note will probably be glad you did too. If not, at least you may find that you can now speak to her without the same unpleasant feelings. But remember: when explaining how you feel, be very careful not to say things that are hurtful in return. If you do, there will be repercussions, and she will in all likelihood become a greater trigger for unpleasantness in the future.

There are other occasions when the triggers for unpleasant emotions are impossible to avoid. Your best friend says things at times that hurt your feelings. He thinks he's being cute or funny, but his putdowns hurt. At times like this, instead of holding your tongue and walking away to lick wounds, speak up. Learn to give him a little of what he is giving you. If you don’t speak up immediately, you will be upset most of the day and, worse, you have lost your opportunity to defend yourself. To mention to your friend the next day that he hurt your feelings is to set yourself up for yet another put-down. (As children we called such playmates cry-babies.) Happily, you will discover that by standing up for yourself you will feel better and your friend’s annoying comments will occur less often.

There are other occasions that trigger fear, and they too need to be confronted so as to render it ineffective. Maybe you have a fear of elevators or heights or a fear of dogs. If you do, then you will need to slowly and carefully confront the feared object. That is, you will need to safely put yourself in the
presence of the trigger. At first do this for only brief periods of time and then gradually extend the amount of time. Continue to do this until that which caused your fear no longer does. In other words, embrace (metaphorically speaking) the very thing that causes you anxiety. In time, if everything goes smoothly while you are in the presence of the trigger, your fear will diminish.

If you are truly interested in bringing your emotions under better control, learn to pay close attention to the events in your environment that predict the triggers for negative feelings. For example, do you find yourself becoming angry when certain topics are brought up or when you are around a certain person? Then learn to spot the predictors for these occasions. Does it always occur at a particular friend's house? Does it always occur when someone brings up politics? Then plan ahead. Decide what you are going to do. Avoid the situation? Arrange to make the trigger less effective? Confront the trigger? Whatever you choose, follow through with your plan when the time comes. If you are successful in this kind of self-management, you will have gone a long way in learning how to enjoy life.

One final comment: if you are unable to follow through on any of the suggestions offered here, do seek professional help. A therapist can help you learn how to manage your life so that you begin to feel better.

Remaining Physically Active

There is truth in the expression: use it or lose it. And this is especially true as we age. We have more aches and pains in the morning and less energy for daily chores. While these symptoms can be related to more serious problems, and should certainly be discussed with your doctor, for most of us the likely culprit is a sedentary life. The body needs regular exercise to function properly.

If you are not engaged in an exercise program, it is probably because you aren't motivated to do so. You might even find yourself asking: is there anything that could ever be said or done to get you exercising on a daily basis? Would a stern lecture from your doctor help? How about the fact that you find yourself out of breath when you walk up a flight of steps? Or, the fact that you have gained weight over the last few years and now find it harder and harder to take it off? If you don't want to be miserable and you don't want to continue with the nagging self-criticism, why not set a start date right now and write it on the calendar? Then start planning how you will carry out the program, talk to yourself about the plan and the start date, talk to others about your plans, find the right clothing for your exercise program and leave them in a conspicuous place, read up on the kinds of exercise you wish to do, start graphing your weight and hanging the chart in a conspicuous place, and then start telling yourself that you must start walking every day if you want to lose weight or want to feel better or want to have more stamina. Then start very slowly...walking for just two minutes a day, for example. The next day, try walking for three minutes. Don't push yourself or make the enterprise painful—that's the quickest way to punish the behavior of trying. Remember: take it slowly. If you really want to keep the program going for the long haul, you will need to plan for that, too. Find a friend or neighbor to join you. Better yet, arrange to take the neighbor's dog with you on your walks. The dog will love you for it and, too, just the thought of not walking on any one particular day will make you feel awfully guilty because you know the dog will be waiting for you. Finally, reward yourself for doing what you said you were going to do. Go ahead, have that doughnut. Just make sure that the doughnuts are eaten only on the days you exercise!
If all of this sounds too overwhelming, then perhaps you need to begin at a lower key. Start with simple stretching exercises. They can be done in the morning while you are still in your pajamas. Listen to soft, soothing music as you slowly begin to stretch the muscles in your neck, arms, and legs. It is surprisingly relaxing and enjoyable...and it limbers you up for the day. You won't believe how quickly ten minutes pass.

There are also a host of things you can do around the house to ensure that you are getting at least some exercise. House cleaning can be an excellent way to burn calories and remain trim and flexible. Gardening, too, involves physical activity with the added bonus of good vegetables or beautiful flowers. Walking to the grocery store, mowing the lawn, raking leaves, or chopping wood are great ways to gain aerobic points. Remember too: while it is always nice to have someone offer to help carry the groceries or mow the lawn, each time you relinquish a task to others you have increased the chances that you will need their help the next time.

Finally, it is important to mention that often people start a program of exercise only to give it up as soon as something interferes—a long weekend out of town, perhaps. Well, it happens to the best of us. All it means, though, is that you start over again...and again...and again, until it becomes as routine as your first cup of coffee.

Remaining Intellectually Active

“Curiosity is one of the permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous mind.”
Samuel Johnson, The Rambler [1758]

The best students of life are those who show a curiosity about the world in which they live. You can be twenty-two or one hundred and two; it doesn't matter. Being intellectually curious makes you interesting to be around and virtually guarantees you an enjoyable life. So, along with remaining physically fit, you may want to consider ways to remain intellectually fit.

Rule Number One-Read daily: The newspaper is a great source of information but so, too, is your local library. Spend a morning discovering the layout of the library. Find the kinds of books you think you might enjoy—fiction, nonfiction, adventure, travel, memoirs—and then borrow one or two of them. If you happen to like one of the authors, visit the library again to find another of the author's work. Why not make a trip to the library a weekly event? Reading books can provide hours and hours of enjoyment; and, too, if you are lost in books you aren't fretting about the minor inconveniences that come with age—like forgetfulness.

Rule Number Two-Learn ways to compensate for momentary lapses in memory: For things that you use on a daily basis, such as car keys, handbag, briefcase, eye glasses, bills, and cash, find a good place to store them in the house and then religiously put them there. For matters that require attention at a later point, make a note for yourself. To-do lists keep your day organized and productive. Writing down on a wall calendar birthdays, anniversaries, and days to pay bills provides just the kind of reminder that will increase your chances of sending cards and paying bills on time. Hanging the calendar on the refrigerator door means that you will probably look at it at least three times a day. Postits, on the other hand, can be placed just about anywhere and can remind you of a host of things you need to do for the day. Put them on the
dash of your car to remind you to stop at the dry cleaners, the post office, or the grocery store. Place one on the kitchen cupboard to remind you to take your medication. Put one near the phone to remind you to call your mother. As a famous psychologist once remarked: if not memory, then memoranda.

Everyone complains of his memory, and no one complains of his judgment.

La Rochefoucauld, Reflections [1678]

The trick is to make a note for yourself—or, if possible, carry out as much of the task as you can—as soon as you are reminded of something that needs to be done. If it occurs to you that you need milk, immediately write it down on your grocery list. If it occurs to you that you need to replace your coffee cup at work, go to the cupboard, find a cup, and put it in front of the kitchen door. You will be glad you did.

If you think your vocabulary is not as strong as it used to be, start playing Scrabble with your neighbor. Maybe, too, it’s time to start working the newspaper's daily crossword puzzle. You might also enjoy a daily visit to Web sites that have word games and word-a-day quizzes. Practice does make perfect, so practice using the word-a-day when you are talking on the phone with a friend or visiting with the postal carrier. And have fun doing it!

Rule Number Three—Take advantage of your creativity: If you have some experience writing, then build upon it. Write letters to friends, make daily jottings in a journal, start that short story you have been talking about for years. If you work well with your hands, start building bird houses for your family members, repair the rocking chair in the attic, or build a coffee table for your patio. Whatever your expertise, take advantage of it. Being creative means producing, and it's the products that provide some of life's greatest satisfactions.

Enjoying the Day

It has been said that the routines of life are actually what keeps us young and leads to a longer life. There are reasons why this maybe so. In part, because you follow certain routines, your body develops a rhythm. If you always wake at 6:00 a.m., you probably have noticed that you no longer need an alarm clock. You just wake up alert and ready to begin the day. If you always go for a brisk walk in the early morning, you probably find yourself putting on your walking clothes without first scolding yourself into doing it. If you always have lunch at noontime, you probably don’t even think about food until 11:45. Your body has not only adjusted to these routines but it seems to have taken on the job of carrying out the task—almost without the necessity of you being present (psychologically speaking, that is). If you follow routines of this sort, you have gone a long way in reducing the minor stresses of everyday life. It is not easy to put yourself on such a schedule—it’s literally one day at a time—but the advantages of doing so make it worth your while to try... and, if need be, to try again.

Unfortunately, no matter how much of your life is filled with routine, the mild annoyances of daily life can turn a glorious day into one of frustration. Does the kitchen door still squeak when you open it? Does the knife drawer still stick when you try to shut it? Are you reminded that the porch light is still broken when you arrive home late from work and can't find your house key? Taken separately, these are nothing more than nuisances that are quickly forgotten. Taken together, you have the makings for a frustrating day. If you can set aside a bit of time each week
(mark it on your calendar!) to fix these bothersome inconveniences, or if you can hire someone to help you a few hours a week, you will have gone a long way in reducing many of the conditions that lead to unpleasant emotions.

Reducing the minor stresses and frustrations of daily life, however, is only half of the story. Enjoying life also requires that you fill your day with activities that lead to a sense of satisfaction. Enjoying the warmth of the sun on a crisp fall day or observing the brilliant sky on a moonless night may make us all feel good, but the key to a happy life involves producing—working on tasks that lead to a product. For example, growing juicy tomatoes, writing daily in a journal, building a birdhouse, or mastering the game of tennis, are tasks that provide you with pleasure long after the work is done. Likewise, becoming an expert on Aristotle or developing a close relationship with a dying friend or relative—these involve products, too!—provide you with years of stories and memories. You see, it is through the slow and deliberate creation of something that we experience the most elusive and yet most enduring happiness—a sense of accomplishment and pride. This kind of satisfaction has little to do with immediate gratification; rather, it has to do with meaning, fostered one day at a time. In the end, you will be glad you took the time.

**Preparing for the End of Life**

For each of us there will come a time when we realize that our life is coming to an end. How we act as a result of this fact can make all of the difference between a peaceful, moving experience, and one that is agonizing and incomplete—for us as well as the ones who care for us. If you have had the forethought to prepare for your death, many of the things that need to be done have already been handled at a much less stressful time. Having a living will allows your family to make decisions based upon your wishes. Having an up-to-date will ensures that your possessions will be given to those whom you wish. If you have already discussed with your loved ones—prior to becoming ill—where you wish to be buried or where you wish to have your ashes scattered, then the difficult decision is made with thought and reflection and before you are confronted with its reality. It is also wise to make sure your papers—life insurance, savings accounts, etc.—are in order and easily located, which will make it much easier for those whose responsibility it is to take care of these matters.

Perhaps the biggest fear of death is that the pain will be too great. But there is no reason why this should be so. Pain management is an essential component of end-of-life care. Don’t be afraid to seek out palliative medicine; it is meant to keep you comfortable. Most hospitals provide such service either within the hospital or in your own home. With the practical and painful matters settled, you can then spend your remaining time in close communion with those who are caring for you. Frequently, people have spoken of this time as remarkably beautiful and moving. While not wishing to romanticize the end of life, it is often the case that people are brought much closer together and poignant conversations occur that are almost impossible at any other time.

Connections form among those who are with you at the end of life, and these connections remain until the end of their lives. It is a time to bring people together and to make whole and complete your life. If you view this time as yet another journey, your peacefulness will have a deep and abiding influence on
everyone who comes in contact with you. In a moving quote taken from her diary, Anne Frank summarized very well each of our responsibilities. She wrote:

“[Daddy] said: ‘All children must look after their own upbringing.’ Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands.” (July 15, 1944)

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The material presented here is loosely based upon the book


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