

Elderly life doesn't have to be lonely

"Women have a longer life expectancy than men," says Carol S. Hollenshead. "But this means they are also far more likely to be widowed during their later years, and they have fewer options for remarriage," says Ms. Hollenshead, development coordinator of the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Michigan.

"The majority of men over the age of 65 are married, according to the national census, compared with only one out of three women at that age. However, these years alone can represent new freedoms and opportunities for women to establish their own identity and independence," she reported in an interview in the December issue of "International Affairs," a monthly magazine for business and professional women.

"Women tend to devote much of their lifetime to caring for other people—first, their own children, and during the middle years, often their own parents," says Ms. Hollenshead.

"In old age, these responsibilities decrease, and they can begin to pursue their own interests. They can be selfish, in a healthy way."

TO ENSURE their independence, women should look into what their incomes will be from social security, pensions, insurance policies and the like, says Ms. Hollenshead.

If their husbands are covered by a pension fund, they should investigate whether they are included under survivors' benefits. An effort should be made to pay off large bills before retirement, and to practice living on a reduced budget.

"In addition to an adequate income, the most important prerequisite to an enjoyable retirement is good health," she notes. "Many diseases and disabilities common in old age can be checked if they are caught early enough; others can be controlled and compensated for."

It is as essential to maintain good mental health as physical health, Ms. Hollenshead notes. Quoting U-M gerontologist Woodrow Hunter, she advises retirees to "adapt to changing circumstances; compromise when necessary and look forward to the future."

"Whether or not you have problems is not the issue; it is how those problems are handled: with a sense of personal responsibility or a tendency to blame others; with a feeling of confidence or a premonition of certain defeat."

"There are many resources in most communities to help persons with major decisions," Ms. Hollenshead said. "Organizations of older people, social workers, churches and synagogues, legal aid societies and community mental health centers are only a few."

"AND FINALLY, don't withdraw from activities or people. Develop new interests and share them with young as well as old friends."

Finding and maintaining friendships can be difficult for the older woman who lives alone, Ms. Hollenshead concedes. For many working people, the job is the center of most social contacts. How, she says, this resource gets replaced after retirement?

"Before they stop working, women might assess their own interests and look for new ways to explore them."

Ms. Hollenshead says. "Perhaps they have a special talent or skill that might translate well into an important volunteer capacity. Private non-profit agencies, political parties and candidates, hospitals, libraries, churches and cultural organizations all have need for a wide variety of volunteer services."

"Older people have much to teach as well as learn. In many communities, retired women are teaching traditional crafts such as quilting, needlework and bobbin lace making. Some schools have enlisted the help of retired persons as tutors. And the rising interest in genealogy has awakened a new respect for the elderly in some quarters and a desire for preserving one's own heritage."

"In sum, today's generation of retiring women have far more going for them in terms of social outlets, medical care, learning opportunities and other resources than did their counterparts of a decade or two ago," Ms. Hollenshead says.

"Reflecting on what a woman in her 60s has experienced—four wars, the Depression, tremendous technological advances and the dramatic economic and social changes which have transpired with each decade—we would have to conclude that such a woman is extremely strong and adaptive."

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Use of the body in mime will be the subject for two new non-degree courses to be instructed by the Mime Ensemble of Oakland University for the Division of Continuing Education beginning Saturday, Jan. 28.

Circus techniques, including juggling, acrobatics, and balance skills, will be conducted from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Saturdays. Illusion, mime isolations (separating operations of parts of the body to create an illusion), and mime scenario improvisation will be practiced in the course Mime: Illusion and Improvisation, to be held from 12:30 p.m., Saturdays.

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