

gerontology

A. Jolayne Farrell

Being alone isn't loneliness

Dear Jo:

My widowed mother, age 79, lives alone in a nearby town. We don't get to see her very often, and I often think she must be lonely. I know she is quite busy. She has her friends and hobbies, but nevertheless, I worry. Is loneliness common among people her age?

Mrs. M.H. Michigan Reader

help in building supportive relationships again so they can remain healthy.

Mrs. H., thank you for your letter. Loneliness is a subject worth discussing when it comes to aging.

Readers can write to Jolayne Farrell at P.O. Box 66, Postal Station G, 107 & Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario M4M 3R2, Canada.

Dear Mrs. H.:

If your mother is busy with her friends and hobbies and does not complain of being lonely, I rather doubt that she is.

Loneliness and the state of being or living alone are two very different things. Loneliness is an unhappy condition marked by feelings of emptiness and longing.

Aloneness, on the other hand, is a lifestyle often deliberately sought so one can live an independent, undisturbed life.

Loneliness is not exclusive to those your mother's age. It is found in every age group. How it is dealt with varies from individual to individual. Common ways of dealing with it are: engaging in frantic activity, listening to loud music and talking (endlessly) on the telephone.

IN DEFENSE of aloneness, many widows (like your mother) have lived lives unselfishly dedicated to their families, and now they are enjoying their solitude.

Philosophically speaking, Oliver Wendell Holmes felt aloneness was necessary for great thinkers, and that those thoughts would transcend life.

To your question — is loneliness a common problem in people your mother's age? — the answer is: It is not a problem for most but it is definitely a problem for some.

Gerontological research is consistent in reporting that there is no correlation between living alone (or even in isolation) and loneliness. It does relate loneliness to other factors such as poor communication patterns, hearing and vision losses and widowhood.

A medical condition referred to as loneliness anxiety presents with symptoms of apathy, suspiciousness and aggressiveness accompanied by feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety and panic. People with this diagnosis obviously need professional help.

A NEW TERM has come to light in gerontological circles — "geriatric orphan." These are the elderly who are alone and do not want to be.

They have lost almost all of the support people in their lives, either through death or distance. It is imperative that these people be given

New chem building for U-M

The University of Michigan has announced the award of \$10 million from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, half of which will support a major new building program in the chemical sciences.

"This exceptional gift from the Kellogg Foundation is one of the largest ever received by the university," U-M President Harold Shapiro said.

Ground was broken Oct. 17 for the first phase of the project, a \$40 million chemistry classroom and laboratory structure on the university's central campus that will double teaching and research space for this basic science.

THE STRUCTURE is part of a \$52 million project to upgrade the U-M's chemistry facilities, including renovation of the old building, erected in 1908 and expanded in 1948.

The state has committed \$30 million for the facilities. The other \$22 million will come from university resources and contributions from individuals, corporations and foundations.

The U-M's new chemistry building will open to students in the fall of 1989.

It will significantly extend U-M's capacity for research and teaching in the natural and health sciences. A future project will be construction of an \$8 million chemistry-biology library.

THE SECOND \$5 million of the Kellogg Foundation grant will establish a new "Presidential Initiatives Fund" under Shapiro's direction.

It will be used to encourage researchers from a mix of U-M schools and colleges to undertake a new set of joint research ventures.

"It is through such contributions that we have been able to launch important new initiatives to enhance our traditional responsibilities to education and scholarship," Shapiro said.

Dr. Robert D. Sparks, Kellogg Foundation president, said, "The University of Michigan's commitment to upgrade its chemistry programs demonstrates recognition of the intrinsic importance of this science to all realms of human activity. Further, the university's new Presidential Initiatives Fund promises to stimulate creativity and cooperation in new interdisciplinary activities."

UNDER THE Presidential Initiatives Fund, project proposals for up to \$500,000 will be invited from U-M faculty members and groups of scholars.

U-M will support 10 to 20 such

proposals during the five-year term of the Kellogg grant. After that, the university will allocate \$1 million per year to maintain the program.

"If it is to develop truly new concepts and theories, the university should place a higher value on diversity than on conformity; on novelty and venturesomeness than on intellectual conservatism; on hybridization of ideas than on orthodoxy," Shapiro said.

The Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 to "help people help themselves" and has distributed more than \$843 million in support of programs in agriculture, education and health. Areas of emphasis within those broad fields include adult continuing education; betterment of health and health services; a wholesome food supply; and broadening leadership capacity of individuals.

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