KNOCKING OVER SOME OF THOSE MYTHS ABOUT GROWING OLD

You can 'boogie' on down life's road or you can bog down

By Paul Evans

Their real names are not important.

She's 76. He's 82, soon to be 83.

She's a retired schoolteacher who taught in the county 30-odd years until a childhood illness flared up and forced her to stop.

He worked on the Bay docks half his life. His frame is solid: The back is straight as he walks. There's no bending. That's something he's always set great store in.

He had a second heart attack awhile back. And her legs are apt to give way sometimes without warning. But they're not complaining.

They're the lucky ones.

Why? Their joint income: the pensions, Social Security and savings allow them to live comfortably, if they tighten their belts now and then.

They have a car. It takes them to church, to the market any other place, within a reasonable distance, they want.

Age has been no curse.

With a little adjusting here and there, they manage to sail along with minimal change in lifestyle.

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Their lives are contrasted with that of a childless widow called "Maude." She says she's 75. Others say differently. Older, they say.

She lives alone and depends on the neighbor boys to buy bagged coal for her stove. Her close relatives are an elderly cousin whom she sees occasionally. Sometimes the cousin's daughters look in if the weather is bad. They have come often this year. More than usual.

Most times, Maude, with social security only, manages on her own.

If she can get to church, there is always a ride home. Maude isn't ill. Her days are lonely sometimes, but most times are filled with things to do.

She goes out to the market: Early in the morning. "Always did like fresh meats and vegetables for dinner," she said recently.

She gets up early each day. Lunch is shared with others her age at an Eat Together program at a nearby church.

Her evenings are taken with sewing and reading her Bible and remembering her beloved, late husband, whose memory she reveres.

On a sunny afternoon, Maude says she may venture downtown on the "streetcar," but always comes home before dark.

She does worry about the cost of food, the cost of gas and electricity, but has managed to survive, living "one day at a time."

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And, there's Harry.

At 70, he is a retired professional man with several post-graduate degrees. His career has been long and full. He's been a widower almost four months. There is a daughter and several grandchildren.

Harry has a wide circle of friends — men and women he's known for years. He is in good health and lives alone. He's looking forward to working in his garden; happily so, he says because he has detested being "cooned up" in the house all winter.

He says he's happy, but would like to have someone to fill that special void at his side.

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It's possible that none of these people has heard of Alex Comfort. Then it's possible all of them are familiar with his work as a physician and medical biologist.

Last year his book, The Good Age, dispelled in succinct language a large part of the stereotypes projected into our culture by tradition and ignorance.

The following excerpts are from that book:

"Aging as you will experience it is not a biological or a physical transformation. It is a political transformation which is laid upon you after a set number of years, and the ways of dealing with it are political and attitudinal.

"The attitudinal lessons are simple and worth comparing with what you already believe or feel about 'aging':

"1. Aging has no effect upon you as a person. When you are 'old' you will feel no different and be no different from what you are now or were when you were young, except that more experiences will have happened.

"In age your appearance will change, however, and you may encounter more physical problems. When you do, these will affect you only as physical problems affect a person of any age. An 'aged' person is simply a person who has been there longer than a young person.

"2. 'Oldness' is a political institution and a social convention, based on a system which expels people from useful work after a set number of years. This institution is bolstered by a large body of ignorant folklore which justifies the expulsion by depicting those expelled as weak-minded, incompetent and increasingly fatuous. None of this folklore is true.

"3. Retirement is another name for dismissal and unemployment. It must be prepared for exactly as you would prepare for dismissal and unemployment.

"4. You are about to join an underprivileged minority. There is no way of avoiding this at present. The remedies available to you will be those available to other minorities — organization, protest and militancy. Don't get trained into aging alone if you can help it. The time to organize and get into a posture to resist is before the floor falls out.

"5. At a set age you will be deprived of half your income. There are some benefits you can and should demand by right, but there won't compensate. You will be poorer than you think at a time when you need more than now, so prepare and reinsure if you can. Best of all, stay in paid useful work.

"6. On the other hand, you need not count on illness or decrepitude. Your memory, sexuality, activity, capacity for relationships and zest should normally last as long as you do, and do last in the majority of people. When they do not, it is for the same cause as in earlier years, namely illness.

And lastly, "As an 'old' person, you will need four things — dignity, money, proper medical services and useful work. They are exactly the things you always needed. As things are today, you won't get them, but there is no divinely ordered reason why you should not.

"So, either set out now to see that you do get them or work to force society to change its posture — or do both."

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While the civil rights movement has seen blacks, women, Indians, gay people and Chicanos militantly demonstrate for their rights and beliefs, members of our aging population appeared ready to passively accept society's definition of them. Until recently that definition was of no use.

But not so anymore.

Our aging citizens are responding to life in the 1970s in myriad activities and lifestyles unheard of in the nation's history. And they are doing it with a zest and enthusiasm hitherto reserved for expressing the agility of the young.

In our next article a description will be given of the types of public and private agencies and services as transportation, leisure activities, medical care, shelter and food and religious opportunities available to make aging as little a departure from enjoyable and productive years as possible.

Dr. Comfort affirms:

"We can't take the pain out of the fact that humans aren't immortal or indefinitely disease-proof, or that illnesses accumulate as we age. We can, however, wholly abolish the mischievous idea that after a fixed age we become different, impaired or non-people.

"The start of this demystification has to be in our own rejection of it for ourselves and then in our refusal to impose it on others."

'THE GOOD LIFE'—Shown enjoying themselves at the Waxter Center for Senior Citizens recently were from left to right, Mrs. Viola Tucker, 85; Mrs. Ada Stewart, 72 and Mrs. Alice Robinson, 75. In the second photo Bob Vance, 66; J. S. Greig, 76 and Thomas Griffin, 70 enjoy a game of cards

Free tax service for senior citizens

A free tax service for Baltimore senior citizens will be provided through April 14th by University of Baltimore accounting students, with supervision from the Maryland Certified Public Accountants Association.

The service will be located at the Waxter Center for Senior Citizens, 861 Park Ave.

Baltimore City residents who are 60 years or older with a single income of $6,000 or less, or a family income of $7,000 or less, are eligible for the service. Recipients do not need to be Waxter members if they meet the above criteria.

For appointments, call the Waxter registration desk at 396-1340.

At the Waxter Center Shooting pool is Hebrew Smith, with James Pace, left background, and Ernest F. Cooper right background.

Bookmobile schedule revised

Effective Monday, March 14, the Enoch Pratt Free Library's bookmobile service will be offered on a revised schedule. Difficulty in obtaining replacement parts for one of the library's two 27-year-old mobile vans has necessitated the revision.

Until further notice, only one bookmobile will be in operation. It will alternate service routes, following the regular schedule for Bookmobile II the first week, and the schedule for Bookmobile I the next.

Our girl (scout) goes to the White House

(AFRO photo by Norma L. Spencer)

MISS MARCIA MARTIN one of the many girl scout representatives from Baltimore to visit the White House.

Marcia Martin, a 17-year-old senior Girl Scout, represented Maryland at a special White House ceremony last Friday when the first lady, Rosalynn Carter was invested as honorary national president of Girl Scouts of the USA.

The ceremony and a private tour at the White House were just one part of a whirlwind visit to Washington, D.C., for Marcia climaxing the national celebration of Girl Scouts' 65th anniversary.

Fifty-three Girl Scouts, one representing each of the 50 states, Puerto Rico, Troops on Foreign Soil, and the District of Columbia, participated.

From the White House the girls visited Capitol Hill for a Congressional reception and luncheon. Each Scout's Senators and Congressman had been invited to sit with her at lunch.

Topping their day, the Scouts visited the Smithsonian Institution's new National Air and Space Museum for a special program. A double-deacker bus, "The Spirit of '76" carried the Girl Scouts on their rounds in the capital city.

Marcia and the other Scouts had a pre-ceremony dinner at Rockwood, one of four Girl Scout National Centers, located in Potomac, Maryland.

A Girl Scout since Brownie days, Marcia was selected for this opportunity on the basis of her outstanding leadership qualities and her record of service to Girl Scouts and her community.

Currently active as an assistant in a Girl Scout Cadette troop as well as in her own Senior troop, Marcia was part of the 1975 staff for a six-week Scout summer program at the Baltimore Zoo.

In May of last year she served as a hostess at the Girl Scout Bicentennial Festival "SHE '76" at the Timonium Fairgrounds.

A senior at Western High School, Marcia is secretary of the Student Government Association, secretary of the Pinochle Club, and a member of the Natural Foods Club, Sisters for Black Awareness, French Club, Modern Dance Club and the Math Club.

Next year, Marcia plans to attend Lebonon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania, where she will major in mathematics. She plans a career in actuarial science.

Girl Scouts of Central Maryland, which was asked by the national Girl Scout organization to select the Maryland representative for this special event, brings Girl Scouting to girls 6 to 17 in Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford and Howard Counties. It is a United Way agency.

TRIUMPHANT RETURN—Troop 1308 is all smiles after their return from visiting the White House. (L. to R) Mrs. Adele Murray, senior leader troup 1527; Marcia Martin, assistant cadet leader and a senior girl scout; Sabrina Smith, (AFRO photo by Norma L. Spencer) cadet leader, Hope Hudson, Denita Hatham, Jacqueline West, Denise Wilson, Julia Chance and Berdella Wilson.

U of M black law students honor NAACP

C. Delores Tucker speaks, William Murphy Jr. cited

Nearly 100 black law students from the University of Maryland gathered last week to honor the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for its work in "freedom fighting" during the second annual dinner - dance of their school association.

NAACP president Enolia P. McMillan accepted a written commendation and a $500 life membership in the civil rights group paid in full by the Black American Law Student Association.

William H. Murphy Jr., a well-known local criminal attorney, accepted an award for his role as co-founder of BALSA as a law student in the sixties and for his close association with it as a member of the bar.

The guest speaker was Mrs. Delores Tucker, the first woman to be secretary of state of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or any other state.

Highlights of the Martin's North dinner - dance, which drew luminaries from the local bench and the downtown legal fraternity, as well as their wives, included:

Black students hold 15 out of the 21 positions of the Student Bar Association, the student governing body.

Black students are active in the Moot Court, the trial court used for demonstration purposes. Four black students are on its board.

Black students are participants in the several student literary publications at the law school. Additionally, the forthcoming publication of a "Black Law Journal," was announced by C. Edward Hitchcock, BALSA president.

"We are going to keep on pushing. We plan to continue this work," Hitchcock said. He was followed by campus chancellor Albin O. Kuhn, who represented Michael Kelly, Maryland law dean. "BALSA has been a positive and definite force on this campus," he said.

The climax of the evening was Mrs. Tucker's talk.

"We women are people who can make great contributions to society," she began.

"I am tired of what I have had to go through for the last 30 days," she complained. This was in reference to lecture tours to mostly white audiences explaining the meaning of Black History Week's significance to the total population.

"We need to end these two worlds — two societies. This is one world. We are working toward that day," she said.

Posing the young lawyers as a court of law, she requested: "I appeal to the equitable justice of this tribunal, to this community of young black lawyers. Society is on trial. But, the evidence on the scale of social justice could be balanced."

"Though disadvantaged," she declared, "you are members of the intellectual community."

"Do you remember little 'Kizzy' from the television show 'Roots'?" she asked.

"Like 'Kizzy' no power on earth can stop you. A skilled lawyer can hold power for good and evil. Witness the parade of skilled black lawyers who have altered national policy. The ability to alter national decisions: Nothing is more important to future indigenous black leadership. There is no better springboard to power than the law," she recommended.

Among other salient topics in her 30 - minute address were:

Blacks have only one lawyer for ever 7,000 people.

Prisons are plantations for blacks.

Blacks must capture more than two per cent of the judicial seats in the country.

There is a need for good legal services for the poor.

"We must expand the concept of legal aid and legal security. If Social Security, why not legal security? If food stamps, why not legal stamps? If blue shield, why not legal shield? All of this paid for by joint contributions of the people and the government. Legal services are too important to rely on the ability to pay," she said.

Pounding the lectern, she told the applauding audience, "The heart of social reform lies in the state and federal legislatures. But, the key of power is the key of learning: Learn the rules and acquire the tools. Master your field."

"You know we are a super-people," she revealed, turning to Chancellor Kuhn and smiling: "We have had to make something out of less than nothing. We need to have vision, courage and commitment."

"Sign the death warrant for sexism and racism. Let equity reign," she implored to the thunderous roar of applause and cheers from the audience.

"I am glad black lawyers have paid tribute to our past. We have not finished the job," Mrs. McMillan said in presenting the group's $500 life membership:

"We are going to need all of you. We want to shatter the image of the NAACP as an old folks organization."

"You have put a song in my heart," William Murphy admitted when he received his award.

A 1969 graduate of the law school, he said he sees himself as a "black lawyer who happens to be excellent."

He attributed his success to "my wife, Betty Jean, who nurtured me and put me through law school."

RECEIVING certificates and awards are Mrs. Enolia P. McMillan, president of the NAACP, from BALSA president C. Edward Hitchcock.

Next William H. Murphy Jr., on the right, receives an award from Earl Martin, vice president of BALSA. In third panel, the evening's guest speaker, C. Delores Tucker, is shown with the Hon. Davis Tomasin, assistant secretary of state for Maryland.

EVENING'S GUESTS — Supreme Bench Judges Milton B. Allen, Robert Watts, Joseph Howard and Mrs. Howard are shown chatting with guests.

Photos by J.D. Howard

DOING IT RIGHT — Dwight Petit, left, president of the Monumental Bar Association, and Dr. Oakley Saunders, AFRO Board member, second panel right, chat with table guests. In the third panel, Dr. Emerson R. Julian, the city councilman (foreground, Mrs. Julian (back to camera) and Mrs. Juanita Jackson Mitchell are shown.

FUTURE ATTORNEYS — Shelly Todd, mistress of ceremonies and Michael Lee, secretary of BALSA, talk in first panel. Shown in second panel, Mrs. Lunette Young and husband David, along with Leo Jones, editor of the Black Law Journal talk. And in the right panel David Beckham and Elizabeth Julian chatter together.