

Young and Old - Our Need to Feel Wanted

During this summer I had the opportunity of working in a nursing home, and for the first time in my life I think I found out what it was really like to deal with old people. I discovered that they are just the same as you and me. They have the same basic desires, needs, and wants and there is nothing old-fashioned about that! They are very frank, curious, and open about things around them and are possibly more cynical about the troubled times we live in than you may think.

For those of you who have never had any practical experience with nursing homes, you are missing a real-life, three credit course on death and dying. Where I worked there were a hundred people - 90 female and 10 male (Hey, fellahs, those womenfolk are outdistancing us menfolk, so let's get together and plan our strategy!) The average routine for a day would be eat, sleep, excrete, and walk if you're lucky. During the course of the day, you may be put in your wheelchair, but if not, you are to be confined to the bed (alone). There are several activities during the week purposely prepared for group interaction, such as Bingo, movies, and Bible sessions, but that's about it. Oh, and if you're lucky, you may have an occasional bi-weekly visit

from a relative. The majority of patients are able to walk and communicate reasonably well, but there aren't that many people working in the home to help fully satisfy both these needs. As a result, the patients don't get to talk to anybody that often, nor do they get the exercise that they need to help keep the blood circulating, which is vital in order to maintain an alert mind. In regards to alleviating pain or making sure that patients go right to sleep, there is a steady diet of pills consumed by the patients, thus making them feel constantly drowsy and somewhat confused.

In observing and helping these men and women, I sensed mixed feelings of pessimism, anxiety, hostility, alienation, not feeling wanted, depression, as well as cheerfulness, humor, warmth, and optimism. I felt satisfied that these people appreciated what I did for them: i.e. cleaned, showered, shaved, dressed, lifted, walked, cleaned up after, put to bed, got up out of bed, etc, but I felt very depressed because I don't feel people are meant for such a mind blowing experience at the end of their long, hard lived lives. I was very discouraged and upset about the fact that we have to put living history books away in a

home. I agree that there should be some sort of accommodations set up for elderly people who are physically disabled and who have no family or home, but why do we have to put those old people who are still productive, who still want to be with their families, who can still do everything you or I can do but at a slower pace, away in a house (not really a home!) where they vegetate and just wait to die! I could be wrong, but in the final analysis it seems that the real reason we put old folks in these desolate places is because we have no time to take care of them, they are in the way, they are a burden to have around.

Did you ever ask yourself what happened to the elderly 40 or 50 years ago? Were they put in nursing homes? Why, nursing homes didn't even exist then! The old died in the presence of their families with respect and dignity. We may ask ourselves who is accountable for neglecting the old. Can it be the same people who are responsible for neglecting alcoholics, suicidal cases, drug addicts, the poor, ect? I think that we, as a human race, are all responsible and accountable when it comes down to caring for people. We can all make time if we want to say " I care." We can no longer go through the

superficial motions of " Hi, how are you? " because if we do, we are merely relating to others as robots, using the disguise of a role or a mask. We have to relate to each other as people- People who have similar problems as well as the same basic needs and wants. If this could be done, we could call this world of our's home.

If we continue to remain passive and disinterested in establishing an environment where people feel that they are worth something, insecurity, inferiority, uncertainty, alienation, and depression will continue to overwhelm in our lives. We might as well get ready, because there will be a long waiting to get into those nursing homes. Let us therefore get to know who we are as individuals, for once we gain our own acceptance, we can go out of our way to make each other feel wanted. It is very hard to live without support, acceptance, care, respect, trust, and communication. Whether we are rich or poor, fat or skinny, radical, liberal, or conservative, male or female, let us strive towards being open, honest, and sincere with one another so that our emotional appetite may be fully nourished and not starved.

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