

THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

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Healthy Aging Supports Lifetime Independence

By John M. Parr



The Washington State Bar Association has an annual senior attorney CLE that I try to attend each year. It is predictable that I will sit with a few lawyers from my community who I have known over the years, and it doesn't take long for one of us to recall a past event in our legal community that causes us to laugh or fondly remember. From time to time for the rest of the day we share

our personal *Do you remember?*

We also play the *Isn't that so-and-so?* or *Did you hear about what happened to him or her?* game. *He sure looks old! She dropped dead walking out of the courthouse! He suffered such a long, protracted illness!* Our talk always seems to make it different for us. After all, we look young for our age, don't we? We are more alert, more vital, and more involved, aren't we? Then

someone in our group will remind all of us that "we" are "they"!

My legal practice emphasizes estate planning, probate, and elder law matters for senior adults and their families. I give advice on the "what ifs" of aging on a daily basis. As the holder of the knowledge and the messenger of the news, I sometimes feel insulated from the observations I make and the advice that I give, but I only have to think about my first job after high school graduation at the local funeral home to place my denial into perspective.

During my funeral home days I learned two lessons. Lesson one was that people died on a regular basis. Lesson two was that many deaths came wrapped in some form of "what if," "if only," or some other form of disappointment for something unsaid or undone.

Aging is a process that started at our birth and will end our time on earth when we die. It is highly individual and can be affected by many factors such as where we were born, where we live, our marital status, our level of education, what we eat, our heredity, and our physical and mental health. Here I highlight a few things that can help us delay old age and make the journey more enjoyable.

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Healthy Aging

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Take Good Care of Yourself

Exercise regularly. Walk 30 minutes each day even if you have to break it up into 10-minute segments. The benefit is the same. Improve your balance by standing on one foot and then the other at least 30 seconds each several times a day. Develop a simple stretching and strength-building program and use it at least four times each week. A good, free reference book to follow is available from the National Institute on Aging: *Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide*. You can download the book, order print copies from www.nia.nih.gov, request it by phone at 800/222-2225, or request it by mail at P.O. Box 8057, Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057.

Eat less/eat well-balanced meals. If you add this to exercise it will help you maintain a healthy weight. Tufts University has an excellent website concerning nutrition at www.nutrition.tufts.edu.

Listen to your body. If your body tells you that something has changed, such as a new, sharp, and continuous pain, a mole that seems to be enlarging, a lump that just appeared, or shortness of breath, make notes and call your doctor for an appointment.

Challenge illness and disease. Get a regular medical checkup. If a medical problem is discovered talk to your doctor then research the illness or disease. The federal government and state medical associations have free information on many subjects concerning illness and disease.

Wash your hands and practice good hygiene. You will feel better, and you will reduce your risk of colds and flu.

Go to the dentist. Your mouth can be the passageway to good health, so brush, floss, and have regular cleanings.

Get your hearing tested. Hearing loss is a classic chronic illness of older adults. Hearing loss creates a barrier between professionals and their clients. As we age hearing loss causes us to avoid social interaction. As time goes on we isolate ourselves causing loneliness and depression. To read about a journey from hearing loss to hearing aids visit "For the love of my daughter's voice" on the "This and That" page of my website, www.parrlawfirm.com.

Maintain and Enhance Your Mental Outlook

Stay in touch. Take the time to visit with the lawyers and staff in your office. Call or write to old friends. If you haven't heard from a family member for a while, give him or her a call.

Travel. Explore the area where you live. Think about a favorite spot you haven't visited in years and make a weekend trip out of it. If you always wanted to go somewhere and you are putting it off, get it on your calendar or your "bucket list."

Be involved. Look for opportunities in your community to become involved. Renew your involvement in

community activities you have enjoyed in the past.

Make sure your "I love yous" are up to date. Make sure all the important people in your life know how you feel about them. If you need to build a bridge over troubled waters to a family member or friend, start building.

Read and listen to music. Always have a good book at your side and play your favorite music.

Develop or Maintain Your Spirituality

A moment in time. Do you ever wish for more hours in your day or days in your life? Time is a nonrenewable resource without a dip stick. Consider rethinking your concept of time to maximize its use. Focus your attention on what you are thinking and what is happening around you in real time, and avoid thinking about what happened yesterday or what might happen tomorrow.

Become a mentor. The next time you have an opportunity to introduce yourself to a younger lawyer, do it. Set up a time to have coffee or lunch with him or her. If you show an interest by listening and asking questions, it won't be long before his or her questions will begin to explore the important events and lesson of your life.

Nature calls. If you find solace and inspiration in nature, find a park or a trail near you and go there often.

Practice your faith. Go to your church, synagogue, or other place of worship or meditation regularly. Enjoy the energy and encouragement of others.

Keep your hopes and dreams alive. Keep faith with your current goals and keep adding new challenges to your list. Live your life with a purpose.

Don't let yourself become cynical. Look for the best attributes in those around you and encourage others to be involved and to do their best.

As you push off from shore and begin to feel the current pull you downstream think about these words from "When Death Comes" by Mary Oliver (www.panhala.net/Archive/When_Death_Comes.html):

When it's over, I don't want to wonder

If I have made my life something particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened

Or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

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