

# AGING *GRACIOUSLY*

A Newsletter for UUCGV Seniors and Near-Seniors  
Honoring Duane Carr who exemplified living graciously and started an Aging Graciously group.

Gracious: Amiable, compassionate. Congenial, considerate. Courteous, good natured, loving, benevolent, big hearted, charitable, merciful, obliging.

## **Gracious Thinking** (Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom)

One way to approach thinking is to make the distinction between “knowing” and “understanding.” Knowing is concerned with information, facts, and data. It is the most common kind of information. For example, Audrey Hamilton is 71 years old, 5’6”, 170 pounds, gray hair, ready smile. She is a volunteer at a local animal shelter. Those are some of the facts, but they do not help us understand who Audrey is. She earned a degree in engineering at the University of Colorado and worked as a project engineer and then manager for over 40 years. Most of that devoted to product development at several companies. Audrey was noted for two characteristics: efficiency and attention to detail. Those traits brought her achievement and honors. Now we know more and can understand her better. She recently realized this: all that she accomplished doesn’t matter. The products have been upgraded or replaced. The people she worked with have moved on. Wisdom suggests that worldly achievements are temporary. In Audrey’s case, working with animals is what she really enjoys; it is a lifelong passion. She volunteers at an animal shelter and brings happiness to animals and people when there is an adoption. Wisdom, here, is to find work that is in tune with inner need.

Another example: There is a grove of cottonwood trees along a riverbank. They are, for the most part, large and tall. Trunks tend to lean a bit, and the branches twist and turn creating a complex design. Knowledge. The reason for the tangle of branches is that each tree must have access to sunshine to thrive. Through the years as the trees grew upward and outward, their foliage took up space. Adjacent trees’ limbs had to find another place. Now we understand why the jumble exists. On a nearby mountain, there are Douglas firs and aspens, and no maze of limbs. Firs are pyramid shaped so that the needles on all side are accessible to sunshine. Aspens are tall, and their leaves flutter. That means each leaf is likely to find sun. Wisdom here is that tree species adapt and are able to side-by-side.

Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom: it is good to move beyond knowledge to try to understand and even better to think larger and longer to get a wisdom lesson.

## **Looking from Above**

Stoicism is a school of philosophy but really more a guide to living. Stoics are stereotyped as unemotional. That results from their training in which they learn not to react immediately but to wait, think, and then respond. Another principle of stoicism is “to look from above,” that is, to step aside or above and look at an event or situation from a different perspective.

One way to do this is to understand what motivates people. Take for example people who are anti-vaxxers. Many are working class or employed at minimum wage jobs. They do not have a lot of money. More importantly, they do not feel they have any influence or power in the world where they live. They feel restrained, boxed in, with no way out. They rebel. They may also drive loud trucks or motorcycles. Get extensive tattoos. Underlying all that is: If I can’t play your game, I will play my own. They irritate us. And they enjoy doing it. Can we empathize with their powerlessness and lack of self-esteem?

## **The Aging Mouth**

Your chewing muscles lose 40% of their strength as you age. The lower jawbone loses 20% of its bone mass. Chewing can become more difficult and result in needing to ingest softer foods. Some teeth may become looser in their sockets.

Well known is the shrinkage of gums and bones around teeth. That results in exposure of some of the previously covered surface of teeth and can potentially cause erosion of softer tissues. Tooth enamel can pull back from old fillings and expose cavities. Compounding the problem: less sensitivity and reduced ability to feel cavities.

For seniors – more important than ever – brush twice a day and floss once. Rinse with mouthwash as well. Be sure to use a toothpaste and rinse that includes fluorides. If arm and hand strength are lessening, use an electric toothbrush. Always use a brush with soft bristles, manual or electric, and brush along the gumline as well as the surfaces of teeth. Get regular cleanings at a dental office. (Your Mom was right!)

## **Ponder**

Is it really possible to know too much and understand too little? Do we move on so fast that we do not seek wisdom?