

Family Weekly readers speak
their minds on a widespread
and growing national problem.

WHAT DO YOU OWE YOUR PARENTS?



Lafayette, La.

After my father's death, my mother went into shock and has required constant supervision for two and a half years. As my sisters didn't feel they could share their homes, we were faced with either keeping her or placing her in a nursing home. Naturally, we kept her with us.

I teach school—a financial must—so we had to hire a nurse during school hours and give up all of our social activities. Last year, my husband borrowed money on our home to go into business, hoping that success in this would enable me to resign, but the business hasn't prospered and we now face the possibility of losing our home.

At first, our child felt greatly deprived by Mama's presence. Now we all feel that no matter what the cost, the lessons in life which she has brought us will more than compensate for our loss.

Our lives are completely changed; we have conquered life's greatest challenge, intolerance, and we feel unified in sharing an insoluble problem. Our son's friends have changed from rowdy, furniture-breaking demons to polite, well-mannered youngsters who love and respect Mama Dudley. They never pass her chair without a cheery "hello," and one 8-year-old proudly boasts that Mama Dudley is the girl he plans to marry.

We are proud to have come this far, and we pray that we will not lose our comfortable home. We are grateful to our many friends who drop in to keep us company, and to our neighbors who bring small gifts to make Mama feel remembered. But most of all we are grateful for the lesson that taught us to "Honor thy father and thy mother."—Mrs. E.D.M.

Canton, Ohio

Your provocative article was avidly read by members of our Senior Recreational Center here in Canton. We were pleased to see this subject given wide publicity, and we feel that you are stimulating many to face this problem.

There is no simple answer or solution. Kindness, tolerance, and mutual appreciation help toward easing the tension, but the problem is still there. Since we opened our office a year and a half ago, numerous families have come to us with almost the same questions you quoted. There are as many solutions as there are people, but happiness for all is the goal, and the feelings of each person involved must be kept in mind. Meals, a roof overhead, and tolerance of one's foibles aren't enough. The important thing is to make the oldster feel wanted and needed.

Few of our members (all past 60) live with their children, even though most of them depend entirely on their old-age assistance check. They maintain their own establishment, no matter how small. This is important to them, for it means status.

Our 200 members keep so busy for four days each week that they haven't time to complain about what's owed them, or even bother about their aches and pains. They bowl (some of the women are in their 80s), dance, make things in the woodwork, craft, and ceramics classes, volunteer their services in the Community Helpers Club and the Friendly Visitors group, or just enjoy a movie travelogue. —Mrs. Adelaide Kintz, Executive Director, Senior Recreational Center.

Hollywood, Calif.

Your recent article might have added "The elderly man of 71, who still enjoys life very much." I live on a pension of \$115 a month. In the Summer I rent a cottage in the mountains for \$40 a month, and in the Winter I get a room with friends in town for the same amount. My three married children in Pennsylvania wonder how I can live so comfortably and happily on so little.

I have to do it. After a coronary in 1954, a mild stroke in 1958, and a recent attack of arthritis in my feet, I know I must eat moderately, rest a lot, walk some each day, and keep busy with regular chores. Lately I have tried my hand at landscape painting. I have lots of flowers and a fine lawn around my cottage in the mountains. Also, lots of friends.

I would say to all younger folks, "Don't feel sorry for us oldsters."—J.H.C.

In a recent issue, Family Weekly invited readers to give their opinions on how we can help our elder citizens and, more specifically, what we owe our own parents when they grow old. From the thousands of replies, it is apparent that Americans everywhere are devoting a great deal of intelligent thought and effort to finding solutions for this problem, and that most solutions are achieved with the heart acting as the guiding factor. Here is a selection of some of the most interesting letters received.

Holland, Mich.

I worked three years in a county hospital, mostly with older people. Many of them became my friends, and I visited them after their discharge. I was shocked to find many of them in dreary, dismal rest homes, and I decided to start a rest home of my own.

After spending much time on research, on actual costs for a building, staff, food, and so on, I found the picture so discouraging as to be prohibitive. No matter how simple I kept the plan, the fee for the potential guests would be too high, even if it were operated on a nonprofit basis.

Thus it should become a community matter, in the same way as communities pool their efforts for other worthwhile projects. Find out how many people face the same problem in your community. Get them together. Pool resources. Study the immediate need, and the growing need for the years to come. Ask the cooperation of doctors, welfare workers, and the other professional leaders. Don't forget to include able elderly people. They know what is needed and will enjoy helping.

When authorities say that a little more kindness, tolerance, and mutual appreciation help, they shouldn't forget that a sense of humor is important, too. As an aftermath of the war in my native country, the situation was reversed. Many parents were obliged to take in their married children because of the housing shortage, and it often took from six to ten years to get an apartment. I observed from letters that a sense of humor often turned seemingly serious conflicts into lighter ones, with laughter that later was remembered lovingly.—Regina Allen

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