

## Research into Aging Reveals Important Lessons

Cornell University professor Karl Pillemer had seen studies indicating that many senior citizens were happier and better adjusted than people who were decades younger – in spite of varying degrees of chronic disease. He wanted to find out not only if these studies were accurate – but also *why* older persons were able to attain a level of contentment that eludes younger generations. His method was to get “up close and personal” by interviewing 1,500 individuals age 70 and older in what came to be known as The Cornell Legacy Project and later a book entitled *30 Lessons for Living: Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans*; New York: Viking, 2011  
[www.legacyproject.human.cornell.edu](http://www.legacyproject.human.cornell.edu)

Dr. Pillemer observes, “Up until 100 years ago, people wouldn’t think of going to anyone other than older people for advice. But we’ve lost that instinct.” That’s too bad because if there are secrets to navigating through life in a positive manner, these are the people who have discovered them. For example:

- **On savoring the present moment:** One respondent (April) observed: “This morning I smelled the rich Irish cream coffee brewing in my kitchen as my feet touched the chilled wood floor. I wrapped myself in my comfortable fleece bathrobe and bit into the warm, buttered wheat toast. To see, to hear, to smell, to touch with clarity and discernment – that is the poetry of living at each turn.” How many of us would have *completely missed* this sensual experience by focusing on our electronic device during this same breakfast?



- **On living honestly:** According to Mamie, “When it’s all said and done, you have to do things the right way. There’s no outdoors or backdoors to lying. Somewhere along the line, you have to become honest with yourself.”
- **On worry:** Ninety-five year old Olivia observes, “We generally worry about the wrong things. The calamities I lost sleep over didn’t materialize. What a waste!”
- **On pleasing others:** Agnes, stated, “I spent a lot of energy trying to live up to others’ expectations of me. If I try to please someone now, it’s because it pleases *me* to do so.”
- **On getting along:** According to Frederick, “Everyone has some point of view that you may initially reject, but always give it consideration. If you’re a conservative or vice versa, always listen hard to the other point of view.”

Clearly, the Legacy Project demonstrates that the elderly have a lot to teach us! But we in turn may need to help them live comfortably and with dignity in their senior years. We invite you to contact your EAP for emotional support and/or detailed information on local eldercare resources.