

## **How to Start the Day: Reflections on the International Day of Older Persons**

*Jody Costa*

The latest one sits patiently on the edge of my new editorial desk, crumpled. It is a clipping of a poem from Albert Garcia named *August Morning*. It ends with the question, “How do I start this day,/I who am unsure/of how my life has happened/or how to proceed/amid this warm and steady sweet-/ness?”

The clipping is from my father; consummate reader that he is, it is just one of many that stays dusty in my car, lives under my bed, clutters my purse, and piles up under stone coasters on the coffee table. It is a running joke now—him coming to me saying, “I’ve got something for you to read.” Many times I would simply slip it into some dark jean pocket to be washed and forgotten, or perhaps read. Some are about politics, some about jazz or the Beatles, some about saving money (given during the college years), some are witty Kevin Coward articles, and so on. When I read them, I begin to know my father a little bit more. They illuminate the themes running through any given moment of our lives.

At this point, I am beginning my career in publishing. My father, on the other hand, has just finished a thirty year career. He is unsure of how to proceed. We played golf the other day and talked at length. What is there to do after retirement? How do you fight that loss of self-worth when you are no longer earning a paycheck? What is there to look forward to; is it worthwhile to begin again?

This is the larger issue; one to recognize on the International Day of Older Persons. It underlines one of the largest challenges that face a rapidly aging global population. Those retiring are bombarded with the same tireless message—that with age comes decline, with age comes dependency, with age comes only stubborn aches and wrinkles. We are so used to hearing the stereotypes that they are now transparent, a subliminal absorption into fact. There is no awareness that ageist statements are not absolute truth; in fact, we are currently presented with two perceptions—absolute denial of the aging process or resignation to being “old”. But isn’t there another option. When are we going to talk about how a healthy lifestyle can mean you are walking confidently into life after retirement? Check that, how about jogging into life after retirement.

Somewhere on the 12<sup>th</sup> hole, I turned to my father and remarked that really, he can do whatever he wants now that he is retired. “Think of the possibilities,” I said. And I believe it; for my father, the world really is his oyster if he can learn to view it in that way. Part of the reason I believe so firmly in his abilities is that he is healthy, active, and engaged. This is the inspiration I take with me to work; I want people to see that with healthy choices and confidence, retirement will be a time of great opportunity and growth, like it will be for my father.

As Garcia wrote, it is hard to know how to proceed. Retirement opens the world again; and that kind of freedom can be the most frightening kind. I think that was, and still is, the hardest part for my father; when you know one way of life for thirty years and it ends,

how do you know what to do? I imagine it might be like waking from a deep sleep; groggy and confused, it may seem easier to roll back over and accept the ageist view that you are just too old. But, I believe that by changing the global perception of aging, we will open eyes. This is what the International Day of Older Persons is about—it is about stopping to recognize the many contributions of older people and to continually support new opportunities for those over 60.

I hope observation of this day will open a dialogue between generations and create solidarity between younger and older. I see it as a large scale version of the talks I have with my father. Let's talk about our fears and ideas. Let's read about the positive impact that older adults have on our world. It is our responsibility to change the view of aging from one of burden to one of inspiration.

So, how do we start this day? I start by reaching into my jeans and pulling out a crumpled piece of paper. I sit quietly with tea and read a Garrison Keillor clipping from my father. When I'm finished, I do something I have not done before; I call to thank him.

---

Jody Costa is an Associate Acquisitions Editor with Marketplace Books Publishing, based in Columbia, Maryland.