

This is a monthly diary giving updates on activities at Graceful Living and providing information on ageing 'gracefully' to help elders live a life with maximum ease



## ONLY AND LONELY: *One must learn to live alone*

When young, the need for freedom is so intense that all that the youth wants is to be left alone...so loneliness or aloneness is akin to freedom. At that age it is important to do what one likes without interference. But on growing older, the need for aloneness dissipates. Of course there will be moments when the importance of 'me' time will usurp all other feelings, BUT living alone is a strict no-no for many.

Why this fear? Recounting one incident, a senior lady went for a bath, sat on a plastic stool and soaked her feet in a bucket of hot water. After 10 minutes of fermentation, she stood up and instead of stepping out of the bucket she chose to walk to the shower area – hardly a foot away – while her feet were still immersed in the bucket and hey presto! Her bucket skid and she fell on her back. Luckily she didn't hit her head being fully aware and held it up. But her fright, her fear, very, very real. Her door was reachable and she slowly crawled and managed to open it. She yelled out for help and her son and the maid came running. Fortunately, the fall was not so grievous and she survived the fall. But this is not always so. A fall, more so in the bathroom, can be fatal.

**LESSON TO BE LEARNED:** You may think you can do all acrobatics because you don't feel old. But the truth is: YOU ARE AGEING. The body is no more agile but the mind seems to think otherwise as the feeling of being young (mind and emotions) supersedes all else. Ageing is a gradual process: One must be aware of the body's limitations and what could be done at 30 is impossible at 60. So instead of worrying about living alone if you must, one must deal with the body sensibly.



There are several reasons which may force you to live alone: death of a spouse, separation/divorce in a marriage, children who desire a nuclear family and are no longer living with parents, children away, studying abroad. Another reason is that with the average age of survival increasing, the parents when they turn 80 plus have children who are by then 60 plus. So who can help who is the moot question.

**Study Done:** *The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs projected that the elderly population in India is going to rise from 8% in 2015 to 11.5% in 2025 and 19% in 2050. They have also projected the old-age dependency ratio for India to increase from 9/100 (2015) to 11/100 (2025). Now, as the population is increasing, the demand for earning a livelihood is increasing and becoming more tough, making the younger generation leave their homes and settle in distant localities to earn and send money to their elderly parents. As a result of which, unlike older times, elderly people are gradually becoming lonely and staying in solitude in their houses. As people get older, they get vulnerable to different medical and psychological problems.*

*Conventionally, in India, the elderly have always been treated with great respect and occupied a prominent position in the family. The younger generation felt duty-bound to serve them. In rural India, the joint family system is still prevalent, but in search of jobs, there are increasing migrations of younger generation from rural to urban localities leaving the elderly in their homes all alone.*

As people get older, they get vulnerable to different medical and psychological problems. These include: Monetary, food, being uncared for with nobody to look after them, depression, health issues, hospitalisation, marketing, be it for medicines or groceries.

The root cause of all problems is the lack of family support. It results in poverty, decreased health care and hygiene, hunger, poor housing conditions, which when coupled with neglect and abuse from people results in increased mental illnesses among the elderly population.



There are few recommendations mentioned in the article for developing the condition of the 'elderly staying alone' in India that may be at familial, societal, and at the policy level.

- At the family level, the younger generation should be more thoughtful about the elderly. In case they need to leave their cities, they should make alternative arrangements so that the eldest family member is not alone at home and does not become a victim of negligence and abuse.
- The elderly people enjoy the company of their grandchildren and the kids should not be prevented from mixing with their grandparents in case of living together.
- The elderly need regular health check-ups and medication. It is the duty of the younger generation to cater to their needs in their last days and they (youngsters) should not allow them to go into depression.
- The society needs to be more elder-friendly, especially to those who are all alone in their latter days. Societies should have a dedicated place or a clubhouse for the elderly to meet, talk, gossip, and share their feelings. Some entertaining facilities like games can be arranged.
- NGOs play an important role in rendering services dedicated to the elderly group. The number of government-aided old age homes can be increased, even in rural areas, where they will have a place to stay, get food to eat, have regular health check-ups, and a peer group with whom they can share their feelings. A separate administration should be established to work for the problems of the elderly who are staying alone.

Asha Gurnani Vohra

Ref. UN, WHO, GOI's Ministry of Home Affairs.



## MOVING ON WITH STRENGTH AND GRACE



**Devika Phansalkar**

Psychologist

“Haven’t I asked you not to fill the cup to the brim with tea? My hands tremble, I end up spilling hot tea on my pyjamas!”

“Don’t try to wear your pants in the bathroom. You might fall and break your hip bone.”

If you are a senior citizen or you have elderly family members at home, such exchanges are routine. After years of effortlessly navigating through the physical and environmental challenges of life, old age seems daunting in the face of even the most apparently harmless situations. So why does this happen despite (possibly) increased financial and emotional maturity gathered over years of hard work and wisdom? It is the fallout of diminishing physical abilities with age. Suddenly the outside world seems overwhelming with its uneven roads, speeding traffic and one realizes that one cannot keep pace with this hustle and bustle. Literally. Crossing roads seems scary, fear of losing balance becomes real, sudden drop in sugar levels or increased blood pressure causing the senior person to collapse on the road may happen. Wet bathroom tiles, slippery surfaces become potential hazards.

Reduced mobility and flexibility, weakened eyesight or hearing, growing incontinence make the elderly fearful of moving confidently in the outside world as well as cautious even at home. For the rest of the family, the insistence of the elderly to have

things kept in a specific way or place seems annoying, but it comes from the insecurity of the inability to look for misplaced items. When the rest of the family wants a dinner with *pav bhaji* or Mac and Cheese, making a bland khichdi simultaneously, exclusively for the grandparents seems an inconvenience. But the delicate digestion may not allow them (elderly) to binge eat on spicy heavy foods.

So what does the family or the elderly person do to minimize the inconveniences of daily living arising out of physical challenges?

- Practise mild stretching exercises to enable better flexibility
- Breathing exercises for pulmonary health as well as better cognition, memory
- Mindful nutrition that may not reverse but at least delay physical degeneration
- Getting old is a privilege not allowed to all! Graceful acceptance of the limitations imposed by ageing is half the battle won! With few changes in lifestyle and support from the family, let us add life and smiles to these golden years!
- Focusing on your mental health. Just like physical health, taking care of your mental health becomes even more important as you age. Whether that means spending time with our loved ones, accepting age as a fact of life and maintaining a positive

attitude, or taking time out to engage in activities that you enjoy, any step taken towards ensuring good mental health not only keeps one happy, but also helps to lower stress, manage blood pressure and reduce feelings of loneliness.

- Using assistive technology can be beneficial as it can make day-to-day living, and therefore ageing, easier and smoother. Whether it is advanced technologies like hearing aids, using mobile phones to ensure reduced social isolation in the face of physical constraints or simple preventative technology such as rubber mats to prevent slipping in bathrooms, assistive technology is a great way to ensure that the transition from middle age to an older adult is as stress-free as possible.

Ageing gracefully is possible when one maintains a healthy lifestyle, is happy and surrounded by the people one loves and doing things that bring joy. While it’s only natural and understandable to feel concerned about the challenges that ageing can bring, planning ahead and speaking to someone about your fears can help one age with grace, dignity and wisdom. After all, ageing is not just about keeping wrinkles at bay. It’s about embracing them and the experiences that they represent and trying our best to have the best possible time in the final quarter of our lives!

## AGEISM - WHAT IT MEANS



**Ms Amruta Lovekar**

Gerontologist & Project Coordinator, Graceful Living

Ageism is rampant in Indian society. It permeates every aspect of our lives. According to a global report on ageism published by the World Health Organisation, India is among the several middle- and low-income countries that account for the highest prevalence of ageism.

But unfortunately there is not much awareness about this topic. What is it? What are the different types?

Ageism is unfair discrimination or unfair treatment to someone because of their age. More specifically it refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards people on the basis of their age. It could happen to older adults and

children as well. It could be institutional, interpersonal and self-directed.

Examples of institutional ageism include discriminatory hiring practices in which people above the age of 50 or 55 are denied jobs because of their age. There is an assumption that older adults are not physically able, are slow and unproductive.

Interpersonal ageism includes disrespecting or patronising older adults or avoiding contact and interactions with them. It is seen that young people could avoid contact with older adults as there is fear arising out of lack of interaction with them. Through Graceful Living we conduct youth sensitisation programs involving interactive sessions with children, conveying the message that we will grow

old some day and hence we need to be sensitive towards older adults. In one school, a boy in the ninth standard had not met his grandparents at all and after we conducted a couple of sessions, he expressed a desire to his parents to meet them. We got a letter from the school mentioning that the boy and grandparents were ecstatic and overjoyed on meeting each other.

Self-directed ageism refers to ageism turned against oneself, like older adults hesitant to learn new skills in life or too old to do any activity.

Unless ageism is understood, accepted and tackled, the rich resource that we have in seniors is sure to be lost.

# I STILL MATTER

By Patricia A Fleming

I am still here, I am still here,  
My looks are nothing special,  
My face reveals my age,  
My body shows some wear and tear,  
And my energy's not the same.

Too often my memory fails me,  
And I lose things all the time.

One minute I know what I plan to do,  
And the next it may just slip my mind.

I try hard to avoid my mirror,  
There are things I would rather not see,  
And even those times when I just catch a glimpse,  
I can no longer recognize me.

The things I used to do with ease,  
Can now cause aches and pains,  
And the quality of things I do  
Will never be quite the same.

I always compare my older self,  
To those younger versions of me,  
And I know I'm wasting too much time  
Missing who I used to be.

But the thing that really makes me sad,  
But the thing that really makes me sad,  
Is despite what people see,  
Underneath my tattered, worn out shell,  
I'm still the same old me.

My heart can still feel endless love,  
And at times it still can ache.

My heart can fill with so much joy,  
And then it can suddenly break.

My soul can still feel sympathy  
And longs for forgiveness and peace,  
And there are times its light shines boldly through,  
And times when it longs for release.

It's true, maybe now that I'm older,  
Feeling lonely may be status quo,  
But it also has made me more willing  
To forgive and let past conflicts go.

So maybe,  
So maybe to some I look ugly and old,  
A person who barely exists,  
I'm still quite aware of the beauty inside,  
And my value should not be dismissed.

So although not as strong and no beauty, it's true,  
I'm still here and want so much to live,

And I know that there is no one in this world quite like me,  
And no one who has more to give.

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GRACEFUL LIVING

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## GL's BIG CELEBRATION

Graceful Living's fourth anniversary was celebrated big time on 21 December, 2022. GL organised a large hall to house 250 people. The Visanji Ravij auditorium was just the right place at MMP Shah College, Matunga. The food, sound system and decoration were organised by MMP Shah College and Graceful Living.

The program started by welcoming our chief guest, Mr Guillermo Devoto (Consulate General of Argentina) and we were so proud to have him in our midst! The FIFA Cup winners! Our list went on to felicitate the guest of honour, Advocate Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar, Mrs Archana Patki, and Mr Manoj Gursahani, our partners, volunteers and participants, and home care associations.

This was followed by a one-hour singing program. Singer Mr Venkat Rao had the senior citizens swaying/jiving to his retro Hindi songs. The people seemed to really enjoy this as it gave them a flashback of the old times. Then came performances by volunteers/entertainers with dance, song, poem recitation, yoga dance. The evening, full of fun and frolic, was a memorable one for one and all.

## FEEDBACK WE RECEIVED...

“ Ms Madhuri Dichwalkar, Arya Chanakya Nagar. Graceful Living and Tulsi Trust organize various activities for senior citizens. On December 21, 2022, I had the opportunity to attend the fourth anniversary program of Graceful Living. Many senior citizens of Mumbai had invited representatives of their associations. The event started in a spirited atmosphere. Eminent members of the society were on the dais. The work of Graceful Living and Tulsi Trust was reviewed. Information was also given about the activities to be implemented for senior citizens.

The seniors who have done valuable work for their senior citizen associations were felicitated. People from Graceful Living were honoured as well. Other fun programs included Hindi film songs sung by a professional, some seniors performed a dance, powada. All had a great time. A big thank you to Graceful Living for making our evening so special.

“ Ms Ujjwal Pathare, Dadar senior association. The program organised by GL was indeed very well organized. The performances of senior citizens were really great. The entire experience was overwhelming and encouraging, motivating others to perform on stage. I appreciate the efforts put into the annual day. Words are not enough to praise the organisers. Thank you for giving the opportunity to senior citizens to be on stage.

“ Ms Ashwini Kajarekar, regular attendee of GL programs. The program was well organized. It was nice to see so many capable people working for senior citizens being felicitated. The music program by Mr Venkat followed by impromptu dancing by students of SNDT College was amazing. It was fulfilling as the program concluded with delectable snacks.

“ Dr Mini Panicker, Sahabhaav founder. I attended the fourth Graceful Living annual day celebration along with my team and was delighted to be present for the versatile program. The team of Graceful Living/Tulsi Trust showcased their service goals and achievements in an exemplary manner. I wish the team more success and glory! I hereby thank Graceful Living for rewarding Sahabhaav.

“ Dr Archana Patki, principal, MMP Shah College. The celebrations of GL's annual day will remain etched in my memory. The important message I carried home was that organisations can come together to create a synergy of effort for the welfare and well-being of a segment of our population.

“

A whole generation worked to empower women, but forgot to teach men how to live with empowered women

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## AGEING WITH DIGNITY AND GRACE

**Tulsi Trust** was established by the Chanrai family in 1975 with an aim to fulfil basic needs of the poor and needy. At a deeper level, it's more than indulging in physical activities. Health care, skills development and education are top priorities. It envisages a fair world for all, working with partners to improve health care and opportunities for livelihood, and education. Add to this, the capacity to understand another's needs and do this with utmost integrity.

**Graceful Living (GL)** is an arm of Tulsi Trust which came out of a realization of a social need for elderly care. After three active years, GL is now a recognized organization for those in their twilight years and has created an awareness through its activities and talks for senior citizens. GL has a social presence viz. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

## ACTIVITIES OF GRACEFUL LIVING

### In Partnership...

- Intellectual companionship and special care programs – includes companionship, counselling and care-giving for Dementia, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's when required. These services are provided through our partners:

#### Echoing Healthy Ageing

**Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorder Society (PDMDS)**

- Physiotherapy sessions which help the elderly to improve their mobility and become more independent:

**PRAJ-The Rehab Sphere** with Dr Pratha Mehta and Dr Rajshri Lad

- Training candidates in 'elder care' in order to have professionals for the same:

**MMP Shah College** – elder companionship course for Sociology students

**Aaji Care** – Geriatric counselling course for post-graduate Psychology students

- Activities for the elderly :

**My Safe Place:** online activity programs

**Mrs Manasi Golwalkar:** technology training

- Sensitization programs for school/college students to create an awareness of the needs and issues of the elderly.

### Direct Intervention by GL...

- Support Group Meetings
- Webinars (Mr Manoj Gursahani)
- Guest Lectures by professionals/experts – mainly on Zoom
- Graceful Living Monthly Newsletter carrying important information for the elderly plus articles by known doctors and other professionals
- Online interviews with senior achievers called 'Sitare'
- Co-ordination by GL to create platforms for senior citizen organizations in the city.



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## ONE LINERS

The older we get, the earlier it gets late.



Why am I getting older and wider instead of older and wiser?



These are not gray hair! They are wisdom highlights! I happen to be very wise.



*Credit: Internet (Best Life)*

## WEBINAR

On 23 December, GL hosted an online webinar on the topic, "Importance of Effective Palliative Care". Four panellists present were Dr Armida Fernandez, founder of NGO SNEHA, Dr Bhushan Thombare, a cardio-thoracic surgeon with Max Health Care, Dr Prem, and Ms Vedika Kanchan, a healthcare change-maker. This webinar was moderated by Mr Manoj Gursahani. The basics of palliative care and its importance were discussed. Questions on who needs palliative care, why it is required and its financial implications were also part of the discussion; 45 seniors were present for this online session.

## VIEWPOINT

Phew! We heave a sigh of relief! Our annual celebration event is over! And our Anniversary Issue is complete ... has been printed and sent out physically and online to our readers. December was an action-packed month for Graceful Living.

Our February issue brings us back to our regular Newsletter status. The opening page has an article focusing on how important it is for seniors to learn to live alone. No one can control one's current circumstances or future events which disrupt one's life. So one must get fortified and prepare to advance forward alone (of course those who are fortunate will have family/some support along the way). We have an article by a psychologist on page two on the importance of maintaining a healthy, happy lifestyle while it's only natural and understandable to feel concerned about the challenges that ageing can bring. Our gerontologist writes on ageism and what it means.

We have put down some of the feedback we received for our event held in December *a la grande!* What is worth mentioning is that we have re-published the poem 'I Still Matter' by Patricia A Fleming on demand by many seniors who seem to absolutely identify with the poet. By far, the most reality-check writing.

Beware of cramps: For some reason, I can't still pinpoint it, I get cramps in the legs every night. Sometimes once, but even twice. We all know it is very painful albeit for a few minutes. Usually I shake the affected leg, wait to feel okay, then go back to sleep. But one mishap is worth mentioning. A few nights ago, it happened again. I tried to shake it off by walking but due to the pain, lost my balance. The inevitable happened. I fell down on the floor.

My take from this, senior or no senior. **DO NOT GET UP FROM YOUR BED WHEN THE CRAMP IS HAPPENING.** It can have a disastrous finale.

**Asha Gurnani Vohra**  
Editor