INTRODUCTION

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When Marcy asked me to consider writing another book together, it took me by surprise. After writing *The Gift of Caring*, I was pretty certain I wouldn't write another book. It was a lot of work, and I thought I had shared just about everything I knew about growing older! But she had an experience that made her realize she needed to start thinking about aging *now*, not wait, as many of us do, believing it is still a long way off and we can confront it when it happens.

And then, I considered all the colleagues, patients, family members, and our amazing readers who have asked both of us questions – questions we didn't answer in our first book, but that are all pressing issues for older adults.

What about kidney disease in old age? I want to hear more about osteoporosis. What if I run out of money? Is assisted living the only option I have when I grow old – I'm not looking forward to assisted living! Should I be on more medication, or less? Most importantly, tell me how I can *prevent* disability and decline for as long as possible, and live a healthy, fulfilled, and joyous long life.

I realized we did need to write another book. So many of my patients ask "What is normal at 80, 90, 100?" I realized we need to describe the normal changes of aging and help our readers understand how they can successfully adapt to these changes. We need to explain how to reduce the risk of dementia, falls, fractures, frailty, and other problems common with aging. We need to illuminate how to best plan for our future. We need to frame aging to optimize health and well-being.

All of us face many challenges as we age. None of us has complete control of our aging process. But a positive attitude toward aging can actually increase our life expectancy by seven years. If we start now, we can harness the power of positivity and

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009330725.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

planning to ensure we feel the way Neal Maine does (Chapter 33) as he experiences the pinnacle of his life's mountain.

Healthy aging has been a hot topic recently. Baby boomers are turning 65 at startling rates. In the United States (US), 100 people hit this landmark every 13 minutes, and this trend is being replicated around the world. As authors experiencing aging in the US, this book is inevitably slanted toward the opportunities and challenges that exist there, but the stories and healthy aging concepts, suggestions, and strategies will hopefully resonate around the world, as we are indeed a global community who has to respect, honor, support, and love each other to ensure all of us can thrive together. This large and diverse baby boomer generation (to which Marcy and I both belong) is changing the face of aging around the world. We all wish to age gracefully and with continued purpose, loving relationships, and, as I see in my patients' expressions each day, avoid the worst fears we all share: Alzheimer Disease and related dementias, loss of mobility, and loss of independence. Trust me: remaining free of these conditions is not just luck. It requires careful attention from a young age. Recent research supports the idea that Alzheimer Dementia is actually a disease that begins in early childhood (when poor educational attainment, poor exercise and diet habits, and low socioeconomic status create vulnerability that increases the risk of dementia later in life).

Many books have already been written on the topic of healthy aging. Products from skin care to medical devices promise magical reversal of the effects of aging. And these promises are not all false! Many of us are still participating in sports, traveling, and working well into our 70s and later – acting 20 years younger than our parents did at the same age, and having the bodies and brains to go with it.

As a geriatrician and researcher who has specialized in the care of older adults for over 25 years, I believe aging well and with joy *is* a mantra everyone can adopt – whether we are rich or poor, have chronic illnesses or are completely healthy, and whether we have a large and supportive family or a much smaller social network.

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Further, we need to do it as a community, not reserving aging well for the affluent or smartest people. The baby boom generation will only succeed into old age if we support aging well for our entire generation. Poverty, low education level, discrimination, and other social determinants of health make aging well challenging for many of us, our friends and neighbors. We need to work together to ensure that everyone has every opportunity to age well.

And so I told Marcy "yes." I would embark on this new expedition with her. This book is modeled after *The Gift of Caring* in that it shares some of Marcy's and my personal stories, stories of my patients and other older adults who are doing amazing things as they age, and then offers practical advice and strategies to assist each of us in enhancing our potential to age well.

It is interesting to note that most of the elders in this book were surprised when we approached them to tell their stories. They said, "there is nothing special about me!" They felt they were just living life; learning, engaging, and finding joy every day. Yet these are the stories that inspired Marcy and me, and we hope will inspire you as well.

To be fair: it isn't easy. We need to attend to physical, cognitive, psychological, and spiritual health every single day. We need to engage in purposeful activities – whether work, volunteering, or helping to care for others. We need to laugh, to be generous, to try new things at least once a week (how about French classes or Oaxacan food?), and make friends younger than we are (so they don't die before us). We need to have a positive attitude, discover new passions and follow them, and find ways we can give back and make a difference. And, most of all, we need to spend time with family, friends, and those who value our support to age just a little better.

The results are entirely worth it. It is possible, if we begin planning now, to thrive in our later years, and to live with joy until life's end. Marcy was shaken into awareness of what aging looks like. We hope this book will allow our readers to plan for their own futures without needing such a dramatic wake-up call!

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