

A third perspective on aging

Pete & Shelley Aarssen - July 2026

Shelley interviewed an 89-year-old widow named ‘Susan’ who recently made the transition from her family home of over 35 years to a senior’s apartment and replaced her car with a newer model. Let’s hear what she has to say about aging!

What are some of the best things about getting older?

“Getting more attention. It’s kind of special. Sometimes you get the best seat in the house no matter where you go. People seem to respect you more and give you more time.”

In your day-to-day life, what brings you joy?

“The birds in the sky, appreciating when the sun is shining. It’s the little things like waiting for a bloom to open and delighting in it!”

What do you appreciate now that maybe you didn’t appreciate when you were younger?

“Well, I’m shocked that I’ve lived this long, and I appreciate the things I see each day. Everything is a bonus at my age! When I see someone who I haven’t seen for a long time, sometimes good memories come back even if I can’t remember their name.”

What do you think has been the hardest part about getting older?

“The hardest part is knowing that I’m not going to see my family much longer, so I won’t see what they do with their life. I’d like to see the ‘I do’s’ and things like that. It’s like reading a good book... you want to get to the ending.”

What are some losses or changes that have been especially difficult?

“I lost my husband almost 20 years ago so that has had an impact for sure. I’ve lost some of my mobility, so I’ve had to rely on a walker for balance but maybe that has slowed me down and made me more sensitive to others. Actually, I’m fortunate, I’m really not that crippled and I have all of my faculties so I’m grateful for that!”

What do you think people misunderstand about aging?

“I think aging has changed a lot in the past 20 years. People are more aware of the aged because there are more of us. I think people think it’s not going to happen to them, but they’ll see... everyone will go through it. Slowing down is a good thing. You don’t have to punch a clock, and you are free to direct your own time.”

How have your relationships changed as you’ve gotten older?

“I don’t think they’ve really changed but I do miss being able to cook for others. I still enjoy looking over recipes even though I don’t make them.”

Who are the most important people in your life today?

“My family... that’s it!”

What makes you feel supported and loved?

“When one of my family members tries to offer ideas that I haven’t considered. Sometimes I take longer than others, but I do try to follow their advice.”

What matters less to you now than it used to?

“Keeping to a schedule. I have more freedom. There’s nothing holding me back from doing something. I don’t value being in large groups of people. I prefer one on one conversations. I only have a few close friends, and I like it that way. I can tell them anything and I can trust them.”

What are you still looking forward to?

“I’m looking forward to my next move. The place is just being built, and I look forward to staying healthy and moving into a bigger more private space where I’ll see the sunset on one side and the sunrise on the other side of my apartment.”

What gives your life meaning or purpose right now?

“Well, I have a little dog that relies on me for everything. And I rely on her too. I think I’m becoming a dog whisperer!”

What keeps you curious?

“I use my reading to cure my curiosity. I don’t read love stories. I would rather read biographies and the newspapers to find out more about what’s out there. I also like mysteries, but I don’t flip to the end, I read them right through.”

If you could share one message about aging, what would it be?

“Keep an open mind. Wait till the dust settles and there’s usually a good ending to most things. Treat others the way you want to be treated. It’s the Golden Rule, and it still works!”

This completes our trio of Perspectives on Aging. Next month, we’ll present some conclusions, deducted from the experience of our asking three very differentiated elders about aging.