

# A conversation about perspectives on aging

*Pete & Shelley Aarssen - May 2026*

We thought it time to test our 'Speaking of Aging' perspective by interviewing three elders from our community, anonymously. The common denominator: they have each lost their spouse and are experiencing aging alone. We asked them the same questions. In this column, our first interviewee is a retired nurse in her 60s who lived abroad for years but the last 20, in Sarnia. "Daphne's" responses!

What milestones have shaped who you are today?

"My nursing training gave me an incredible opportunity to learn about and appreciate how the human body works. My doctor always said, 'you have to be careful not to take better care of your car than your body'. Having a child with special physical needs made me very aware of the fact that we aren't all the same, to be grateful for what we have and take care of it. Travelling in our early years of marriage were milestones and gave me a modern education. Living in Europe required me to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. I realized there isn't just one way of doing things. We worked to integrate into that culture."

How would you describe yourself at this stage of life?

"I'd say that my aim is to age gracefully. To accept what I've learned in the past and continue to learn new things. I want to continue my travels but probably not as often as when I had my spouse."

What are some of the best things about getting older?

"I enjoy my grandchildren, but I don't have the responsibility of raising them. Being a widow, in some ways gives you a certain freedom to do what you want, when you want and how you want."

What brings you the most joy in your life?

"Spending time with the little ones and with my friends is very important to me at this stage in life. You must appreciate them because at our age, some are getting sick and we lose them."

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

"Getting sleep, reading and visiting with family and friends; simple joys that I don't think you appreciate when you're younger."

What has been the hardest part about getting older?

"Watching your children lead independent lives. As someone said, 'you're a victim of your own success.' Losing my life partner at a fairly young age has been a big challenge. Though he was sick for five years we still had a lot of fun. Friends would say, 'we lived more in those five years than some had lived in their lives'. We went on holidays and made memories. We just enjoyed the time we were given and I'm so grateful for that. Those memories can never be taken away."

What do people misunderstand about aging?

"I think they don't realize how quickly it arrives or how quickly your health changes. When you're young and invested in your career while having a family to take care of, you don't realize how quickly those years with your children go."

How has your body or health changed over time?

"Though I'm quite healthy I do have some things to be watchful of like high blood pressure, but I try to keep it under control by staying active, eating a healthy diet and walking a lot. I take medication because in my case, it is genetic."

What does independence mean to you now?

"I'd like to remain as independent as I can and I'm very fortunate to be able to get help if I need it. I think if I'm too proud, I won't ask for help and then I would risk my independence. I have someone fertilizing my yard because I can't carry those heavy bags, but I do cut my own grass. I love that!"

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

"I think they are more meaningful and deeper because there is more time to do things together. When you're younger you have other commitments and it's harder to maintain friendships."

Who are the most important people in your life today?

"My relationship with God, my children and my friends. I spend an awful lot of time speaking to myself, but I know God is my companion along the way."

What makes you feel supported and loved?

"Simple things like going out for coffee with a friend, receiving phone calls from the children and seeing them regularly. I have friends in their 80s and they teach me a lot. We support each other."

What matters most to you now?

"Well, you realize that you only have a limited amount of time left. I've been given such a gift already, I just want to make the most of it."

What matters, less than it used to?

“I no longer value expensive meals or going out to fancy places. A meal with a friend is best.”

What would you tell your younger self?

“Be wise about your choices; don’t worry so much about having enough money. I was the one who always worried about money. My husband was the butterfly and I was the glue. My husband was always looking for the opportunity to make someone smile every day.”

We thank “Daphne” for the wisdom she offered while, ‘speaking of aging’!