

Elderly or Elders?

*Why do we in the UK ignore those who came before us? asks
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“The Little Boy and the Old Man

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon."

Said the old man, "I do that too."

The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."

I do that too," laughed the little old man.

Said the little boy, "I often cry."

The old man nodded, "So do I."

But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems

Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."

And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.

I know what you mean," said the little old man.”

– Shel Silverstein

When I read this, it made me think hard about how we in the UK treat the older people in our culture; especially those who no longer have the benefit of good health or mobility. I would actually include people of any age who are less mobile or have illnesses which prevent them from being as socially active as they might like to be. These people seem to be forgotten and ignored. Some just want to be left alone, but let us not assume that.

I recall walking into the sun lounge at a nursing home where my uncle worked, and seeing a line of pink and blue armchairs with several white - haired people sitting, having a nap, reading, or watching TV. They were anonymous to me at first. However, my uncle began to tell me about some of those he had got to know or whose families had shared their stories. Some of the stories were incredible. Stories of heroism, charity, kindness, talent, adventure. Once I had a name and a back - story for a few, it illuminated each and every person in the room. For those of whom I did not have a story, I began to think about what their story *might* have been based

on their appearance, skin tone, and clothes, what kind of things they would like to do and see, and I began to form a picture around every person in the room.

We often still use the [apparently] derogatory term “Elderly”. Being described as “old” is seen as discriminatory. Why should it? My mother isn't ashamed of being old she embraces it, she always has. She got into paisley when she was forty. Actually, it suited her! There are things she can get away with now in her 80th year that would have made her cringe in her forties. For many of us, the older we get, the more honest we can be, and the less we worry about what others think of us. I worry when I walk in a room of people, “Will any of these people like me?” I look forward to when I can walk in and think “I wonder if I'll like any of them”? In many cultures, older people are revered and respected. With age, wisdom is automatically assumed. These cultures often use the term “Elders”. I like that idea. Some village elders of Tarvin meet at the Methodist Church on Saturday for the coffee morning, but others may well be lonely and in need of company.

So, I urge you, dear readers to do three things, starting today:-

First:- If you have a neighbour or relative whom you know doesn't get out much, whatever their age; bake a cake, or buy some biscuits and take them round, or invite them over for a cuppa and a chat. Give them your number so if they ever need a hand, they can call you

Second:- Get down to the Methodist Church on a Saturday morning and have a coffee and cake. Get to know our village elders, you may learn a thing or two.

Third:- Treat your “Elders” as “Wisers” and maybe you will be too.



Photography: Manu Mohan, manumohan.com

What do you see? Two wise old Village elders? If these two were Englishmen sitting by the seaside, wearing corduroy trousers, sweaters, flat caps and an anorak, would we perceive the same wisdom?