

Have you heard adult children speak of the role reversal they experience with their aging parent? This I believe.....an aging parent whose needs for assistance and care in his/her daily life increase with each birthday will still never reach the point that his/her adult child must "parent" him/her.

I bought that catchy phrase initially, but my belief evolved. A child being parented has not yet reached adulthood's full rights and responsibilities. A child often feels invincible, even immortal. An elder, however, has lived a lifetime of learning and experience, even touching mortality.

I believe an elder has gained great wisdom, paid his/her dues and earned my respect. It's very demeaning to demote an elder to childhood again because of his/her increasing frailty and loss of cognitive function. Although an elder may experience childlike thoughts and behaviors, they still have been and remain an adult. Each elder has unique values, beliefs, preferences; old age does not make these irrelevant or negate one's civil rights. An elder has a right to decide how much risk he/she is comfortable with; avoiding risk may provide safety, but what about quality of life? If an elder is not hurting other people or breaking laws, he/she has a right to make "bad" decisions as long as he/she understands the possible consequences.

My belief evolved from a number of life experiences involving older people:

- Born an only child; Mom was 41; Dad was 56; peers' parents were much younger.
- Maternal grandmother lived with us until she passed away at almost 94; I was in high school.
- Childhood spent on small family farm among adults; minimal peer interaction.
- Mom a 5th grade teacher who completed master's degree in special education and speech therapy; required to retire her 65th year.
- Mom taught in private schools and provided speech therapy from her home studio; at 69 she landed her dream job coordinating Hood River County grades 1 - 12 special education program and speech therapy.
- During my 31 ½ year career in telephone company customer service I overheard representatives who lost their temper, talked down or spoke loudly to elders as if they were stupid.
- Sought career transition advocating for elders.
- Volunteering with Elders in Action, I found and fell in love with "mediation".
- Discovered my interest in all things aging and passion for the principles of elder mediation - my niche. *The magical mediation process provides advocacy for elders and those in their lives.*

I became more deeply immersed in aging issues, taught aging sensitivity and recognized ageism everywhere. An AARP article explained adult children do *not* parent their aging parents. My evolution of belief was complete. Compassionate assistance received is not as parent to child, but one adult to another.

This I believe... elders deserve compassion, respect and to age as the unique individuals they are. Talk with your family about how you would like to age and what role you want your children to play. You know, aging is still preferable to the alternative!