



*Reflections on the
Essence of Aging!*

*by
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Reflections on The Essence of Aging

Having authored 3 books and an e-book, I never considered writing another one. Life, however, has a way of presenting us with new challenges, new possibilities and fresh insights. Such was the case in my decision to share another chapter in my evolving journey and one that has come upon me rather quickly.

How do I begin? At 73 (considered old except by me) and as with anyone of similar age, there are so many factors that have evolved to create where I am today. From being a young married woman and mom (22 years old), raising two children, a 40+ career to include teaching, franchise development and publishing to my current position as the Founder of a women's organization, each undertaking set the stage for the next. Then, like a flash of light, I now find myself at another crossroads. Why is it that waiting for something to happen (anticipation) seems forever in coming and when that something manifests (real time), the experience flies by? How did I get here so quickly? How did time fly by? What is next? How will my future years unfold? (What's in store? Am I ready to explore, navigate and accept changes? That, my dear Reader, is the big question!

At times I feel quite prepared facing aging. I've survived divorce, the death of my son, breast cancer and as I write, I'm witnessing my 95 year old mom's decline. I've remarried, relocated, initiated many career changes and adjusted to life as it presents itself. Given all this, taking this next step – addressing where/what during my life's aging stage is the place I am right now. I know whatever is to be is up to me. I'm in the driver's seat. I get to choose the course, steer the vehicle, adjust to faithful to weather conditions and remain the journey. I've decided to address aging as an adventure! Yes, my adventure.

I say this in light of considering what adjustments are now needed, where my husband and I might decide to relocate that will offer the best situation for support, activity and social engagement. There are so many factors to consider – convenience and familiarity of what is or the excitement of exploring what is yet to occur. Our blended family is in different places – Hartford, Manhattan, Dallas and Costa Rica. With everyone getting older, grandkids positioned for college and siblings close to or retired, each has their own future plan and so must we.



Between the two of us, Phil and I have 150+ years of combined life experiences! If that sounds overwhelming to you, it definitely is for me as well. All those decades from the early and growing up years to leaving home, college, first jobs, marriage, family responsibilities, multiple career changes, divorce, re-marriage and relocations, each phase brought with it adjustments and possibilities.

With the passing years, we've also experienced the joy that comes with getting through the multiple stages of life, spiritual, personal and professional growth, increased confidence and competency. We've come to recognize that whatever circumstances we've faced, individually or together, we have consistently demonstrated the strength necessary to adjust, accept and move forward. The older we've become, the more resilient. Of course, we have a lot of years on which to reflect, situations from which we've learned and that combined with time have been the basis of today's appreciation that we are still here.

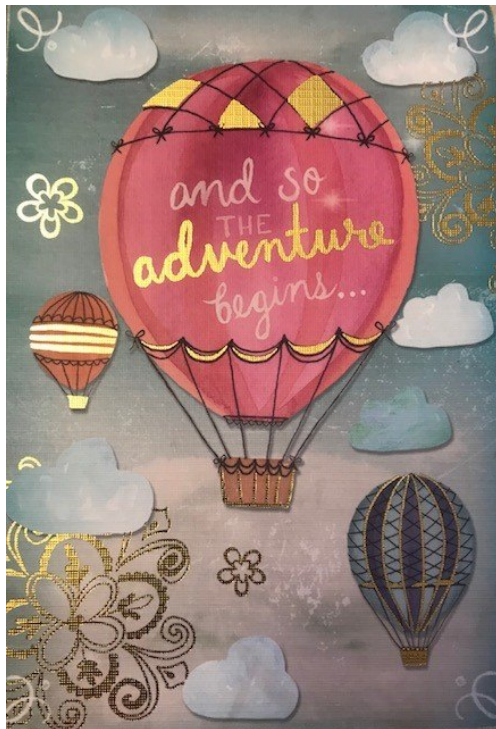
To be fair to you, however, and for me to be completely honest, our next step during this aging process is one that has taken us hours of deliberation, dialogue and, yes, uncertainty. The decision related to 'where do we go from here?' in our life together, was in many ways predicated on my 2 brothers' reaction to what we next want to do. (This evaluation and discussion will eventually unfold as our next chapter.) Phil and I have been the family support facilitators for 14+ years when my mom moved to Atlanta in '03. She was 80 at the time, healthy, vibrant, self-sufficient and independent.

She was frequently eating out, volunteering, enjoying season theater tickets and busier than most her age. While time has been generous to her, the subsequent years have also taken a toll. The 4 years after her 90th birthday have resulted in steady decline. Health issues, hospital stays and going to 4 rehab facilities to strengthen her weakened body have collectively resulted in mom's need for 24 hour full nursing care. Over the course of time, she went from a two bedroom totally independent lifestyle to wheelchair dependent. It's been tough for us to slowly witness her decline. As I write, that's her current situation.

You might be thinking, and rightly so, what does this have to do with my brothers? Phil and I, at 78+ and 73 respectively, recognize our desire to make the changes as I've noted earlier in this conversation. Our needs have evolved in new ways and our focus has shifted. For us to make a significant move and engage in a different lifestyle requires relocating out of Atlanta. Any change we make leaves my mom without local family support. Before informing my brothers of our plan, I faced sleepless nights, moments of uncertainty and the challenge of ridding myself of any selfishness or guilt. Aging has a way of 'unexpectedly' creeping up, bringing up issues and creating urgency. I don't think we are alone in this realization. Deciding (which we have the right to do) and getting family to support a decision are distinctly different points of view! Well, after laboring over all of this, we decided to discuss this with my daughter during a recent stay in Atlanta for a business conference.

Conversation over dinner eventually led up to what we'd been thinking about, our plans for the future and concern over what would happen to my mom once we left the area. Although, at this point, we had made up our mind, understandably, we looked to Elizabeth to hopefully get her positive reaction! I couldn't have imagined what followed. With absolute sincerity and emotion, she was totally in our corner. After reiterating all that we've done to support my mom and the commitment of doing so for 14+ years, my daughter knew and shared that, yes, it was our time. Her loving response and unconditional love filled me with overflowing joy. I really felt her endorsement and desire for us to do what we want for whatever remaining years we have. It was a watershed evening that will long be remembered.

As our next step, we made a decision to visit my 2 siblings in Connecticut during what turned out to be my birthday weekend. Perhaps that was a strategic move on our part? Regardless of any expectation and hoping for the best outcome, surprisingly, my brothers were 100% supportive. They each reiterated that we've done our fair share, we deserve to move on and both expressed their willingness to accept the responsibility associated with our mom. As an added bonus, they gave us the best message of all: "We are totally prepared to do what's ever necessary to move mom to a full care facility in Greater Hartford." I sat, listened and literally was blown away by each of their reactions. I could not have asked for more. Moving our mom **to** where extended family can visit her, love on her and give her the best for her remaining years is a blessing I hadn't anticipated. After all these years, I finally felt valued and appreciated. We talked at the beginning of our extended weekend and everything we shared thereafter was nothing short of family fun, celebration and joy!



All of the anxiety I had anticipated quickly dissipated. Any uncertainty disappeared. What was left was the unconditional love that my daughter, 2 brothers and wonderful sisters-in-laws showered on us...the recognition that it was our time to explore possibilities, venture into new experiences and live our lives without any responsibility other than to each other. It turned out to be a birthday weekend with the best gift of all and that's the gift of endorsing our freedom. I will never ever forget the feeling that came over me - sheer piece of mind.

I have no idea where this major change will lead. We'll be seeking information, asking people we know for their input, exploring new areas and eventually come to a mutual decision as to what's next. We are certain relocation is in the future. There's no doubt that four years of apartment living is slowly reaching the end. The transient nature of apartment dwellers is unsettling and certainly doesn't foster lasting relationships.

At our age, there are few who share apartment residence and this, too, is a reminder that time is moving on and so must we.

Moving North or any place cold for that matter is out of the question! No heavy coats, no shoveling and no winter wonderland are in our future. We're on an exploration journey now, visiting prospective cities, doing due diligence and hopefully make the right decision. For us this will be our last move as we establish ourselves in a yet to be determined community to include new friends, experiences and memories. We recognize this is no small step. Atlanta has been home for 22+ years. Where we go, our engagement in familiar places and activities and the comfort that comes with 'knowing what to expect' will, before we know it, come to an end. In effect, we'll be starting over. The thought of getting lost, establishing new doctors, dentists, replacing my hair stylist and other service providers can be a bit overwhelming. On the other hand, a change of both place and circumstances also lends itself to what I mentioned early on – 2018 is destined to be the year of adventure.

Lately, I find myself reading a lot about the culture and dynamics of aging. Until you're 'there' or recognizing & accepting that you are about to enter the twilight years, it would be difficult to identify with what that last life cycle feels like. My life's experiences, up to this point, tell me that I'm ready. Living through and surviving previous life challenges offer me the respect I've both earned and deserve as I move forward in this life. The responsibility of parenting takes on a different meaning. Job and career, except for the experiences they offered, are over. The demands on my time and energy have been replaced with how I **choose and want** to spend **my** remaining years. Aging is a new ball game. Phil and I are evaluating and planning as we enter the first period. I can only hope that as the game unfolds, I will reap the rewards that come by playing well because I committed during my previous years to be my best self. When I ultimately reach the finish line, I want to be **both** exhausted and exhilarated knowing I gave everything I could in the years I had!

Life is a gift and I have fortunately experienced the gift of a wonderful life. Sure, there were times that tested my resolve, that questioned my faith and that shook me to my core. Looking back, these were also times that prepared, strengthened and shaped me. I now have the chance to become more fully alive,

more engaged and to share the life's lessons I've learned that may help someone else who is also at the same stage in their life.

I have no regrets. That is not to say I could've handled something differently, been more understanding/compassion and introspective. Whatever is now, however, was something else previously. I've shared, I've learned and benefitted from all of my experiences that have collectively created the person I am today. Every yesterday has taught me who to be today. Every yesterday gave me the insights needed to be comfortable with myself, to make necessary changes and to appreciate the value of this journey called 'life'. I've come to understand that it is the quality of what we think and say that makes the older generation a blessing to society. It's not wealth or material things, that lend credibility to our years. It is who we've become that matters. A life well-lived is our contribution moving forward and one that Phil and I are eager to pursue in this next chapter together.

When younger, I looked at 'older' as the 'end in sight'. I have no basis for that recollection other than my only grandparent who was definitely old! While she died relatively young by today's standards, I can remember her living in a very modest one bedroom apartment which was always hot in Summer and cold in Winter! She walked slowly, was hard of hearing and suffered from years of losses, money issues, a very modest lifestyle and the aches and pains of aging. By contrast, Phil and I feel and, dare I say, look young, are savvy grandparents and fully engaged in an active/quality lifestyle. Far from my memories of my grandmother. We see the future with optimism, possibilities and adventure. We intend to make the best of what we have, experience new places and relationships and prove that aging is a number and not a circumstance. Given there are hundreds of active 55+ communities nationwide, I think this proves we are a generation of active and involved adults who continue to enjoy life and have much to offer. That define us for sure. That is the residential/life style location we're seeking.

At this moment, my heart is filled with joy. The joy of having reached where I am, feeling healthy and alive and knowing that there is still more journey to travel are some of the reasons for me to embrace positive anticipation of what will unfold. I'm not weighted down with uncertainty. I'm flying high with gleeful expectation. Where will we live? Who will we meet? What activities will engage

my time and spirit? What challenges will I face head on and come away feeling successful? Yes, the future will reveal itself over time and that time is not too far off. Phil and I have exploring to do as well as decisions to make and implement. We have 4-5 months to carry out our plan and before our current lease is up.

Looking back, I never gave much thought to getting older. I just followed my heart, did what fulfilled me, sought to make a difference by engaging in and applying my experiences and trusting that the universe would support me. When I received my AARP card, it startled me. 'Of age' already I thought? Where did the time go? With a snap of a finger, I became of member of the Social Security/Medicare community. Sure, this is definitely a sign that I've arrived into the world of aging. It also has its benefits! Discounts are some of the advantages of being 'of age'. Our local bagel shop offers veteran/senior discounts. Home Depot does as well. Free coffee? Try Chick Fil A! Hertz honors AARP, Seniors, etc. We always go for the best deal at the time. Believe it or not, there are also caring individuals who welcome giving up a seat for seniors, holding open the door and offering first in line privileges! (Not often, however. When it does happen, I'm grateful.)

It's fascinating what I valued during my youthful years has less impact than compared to what I value now. My family, my health and relationships are at the top my priority list. I value my time and experiences as moments to be treasured. Gone are thoughts of forever! They've been replaced with a sense of urgency and commitment to focus on this very moment. I no longer have to be concerned about my work, pleasing others and saying 'yes' when I really wanted to say 'no'. My life and the years remaining are about bringing who I am and my experiences to a new community, spending time with my wonderful husband, visiting family and friends and getting involved in worthwhile activities. I don't care about ads projecting youth, creams that eliminate wrinkles or living up to anyone else's expectations. Those ideologies are gone. Youth is my history and the future is my destiny. I'm pleasantly overcome by a wonderful sense of freedom.

"Grow old along with me!" Robert Browning wrote. "The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made." To my way of thinking, the author is reminding me that what once was has prepared all of us for our next phase. It's attitude that will make the difference. Optimism will light the way, lighten any burden and be our beacon. Accepting our remaining years as an adventure reminds me that one day I'll be at the finish line. What I do from now until then

makes all the difference. Fully embracing this stage is cause for celebration. I get to 'grow old' when many are less fortunate. I get to experience being 'older' when others didn't have that same opportunity. What a blessing to be alive and to acknowledge my great fortune.

Phil and I are preparing to begin a new kind of life, related to the past, of course, but free of restrictions that once took precedent. Now more than ever,



we must be a gift to the world some way, somehow, for someone. We get to be more of what we've always been. For me, old age gives us the time to grow in new ways. I'm ready. Phil's ready. We're ready. We're excited! We are at the stage now where we can continue to bring our considerable and diverse skills, experiences and

insights into a new world; a senior community of individuals that are wise, strong and a blessing to society. We've lived, endured and have mastered youth, complied with society's blueprint for success and no longer feel restricted. By letting go of the expectations of others, Phil and I get to establish our own! We have learned we can depend on each other, but not be dependent upon one another and that love actually strengthens our individual needs and fosters our individuality. What a glorious awareness! This understanding can only come over time when trust and respect are strong foundations on which to establish a lifetime relationship. It's our rock-solid, as we venture forth, that we are in agreement over what is next and that change always produces growth. Hooray for us that we've come this far in both our years and in our thinking. Now it's about next steps.

We're heading to Florida with two separate trips planned over the next few months. It's likely we'll settle on the west coast – either Tampa or Sarasota.

Both have 55+ communities. We've agreed that's our best option because of all that type of life style offers.

Flipping through catalogues/brochures, checking websites and asking others who have already settled in Florida is helping us as we narrow the field. Until we physically experience each area, we are holding back on a decision. Between beautiful landscapes, abundant clubs and activities and overall playground type living, it already feels comfortable and welcoming. Most likely, visits will seal the deal. We have no doubt that a year from now, we'll be well settled, enjoying a full and richly rewarding schedule, spending time with new friends and the thought of winter will long be forgotten!

One of the facilities offers over 50 clubs. I've already noted the following: Helping Hands/Community, Women's Group, Reading Club, New England Club (I'm from CT) and Phil has the following in mind: Veterans Club, Travel Group, Photography Club and the Men's Discussion Group. He also gave me advance notice that he intends to buy a replacement set of drums which he sold when we downsized from our home to apartment living! You have to love a man who continues to have fun! Hey, you never know where Phil's enthusiasm will lead as there just might be a rock n roll group in the making! All this is to say that we're anticipating great change, adventure and joyous living. Simply by writing all this down, I can hardly contain my enthusiasm.

If you had told me or predicted a year ago that a major change in our lives was going to unfold, I'd have dismissed the idea. Once we settled into apartment living and the ease of coming and going along with scheduled visits with my mom who's lived nearby for almost 15 years, making a dramatic change in location and lifestyle just wasn't on our radar. Now, there is no turning back.

While I'm still focused on making this significant lifestyle change, don't beat me up when I tell you I'm already realizing what I'll miss. Maybe, our everyday routine? Phil's bagel buddies who have convened at our local bookstore for more than 20+ years are going to miss his participation as he will theirs. Maybe it's accepting that LA Fitness and my pool routine will be replaced? Maybe knowing that our favorite bagel shop, Brooklyn Bagels, is no longer nearby? Of course, there's missing the sisterhood that has been a lifeline and integral part of my 15+years as the Founder of Xperience Connections. Whatever it is I'll be missing,

I'm also anticipating the gains we'll make with our new experiences individually and as a couple!

Two weeks have passed since I last shared thoughts and today I'm celebrating! We've just returned from the Tampa area and have made a commitment to a new community (www.ValenciaLakes.com) and an empty corner lot where we will be building our Florida home. A quick decision, for sure. A solid decision, absolutely. We are putting a flag in the ground as we plan and execute our next move and any hesitation has been replaced with excitement. The facility is gorgeous. The activities numerous. The location ideal. The people we've already met, welcoming and encouraging. For whatever the reason, it's happened faster than we had imagined and, we're thrilled it has. Buying a home yet to be built gives us many choices, including the lot, and the opportunity to personalize the entire interior. With the space beyond what we now have, guests will no longer be an issue as we can accommodate those who wish to visit. This has been a major downside for both of us living in an apartment. Although fine for us, unsuitable for overnight guests. This is all going to change and can't come soon enough.

Before I get too far along, there's a piece I've yet to address. I mentioned that my daughter and brothers gave us 100% support for our plan. That was a critical part to us moving forward. When we returned to Atlanta after our Tampa visit and confirming with them we are 'all systems go', the next step had to be to share our decision with my mom. The outcome could go in many different directions. In my mind, I had already role played how I'd respond depending on her response to us. *Those of you dealing w/older parents can certainly relate to the uncertainty that comes with facing decisions that impact all involved parties.* Well, to my mom's credit and to our huge relief, presenting our need and desire was met with both understanding and support. I had laid the groundwork months ago when I shared our disappointment with apartment living, our restlessness over not being with couples of similar age and that we were looking for alternatives. While I never mentioned relocation, perhaps in my mom's mind (which is still sharp I might add), she sensed major change on the horizon for the Parkers. In any case, and regardless of what prompted her response, we were thrilled to hear her sincere good wishes. In addition, she also expressed being

onboard with relocating to Hartford this Spring (2018) to finish her remaining years near family – my brothers, their families and some friends.

She lived in Connecticut until her 80th birthday 15+ years ago. At the close of our conversation, I actually heard some excitement over her making this change, so my heart is filled with anticipation for all of us.

So, here I sit excited about the adventure about to unfold and being really honest about how I'll feel letting others know our plans. Phil and I have 22+ years of work, relationships and investment in Atlanta. Our history in Georgia began when we moved here in 1995 as 'newlyweds'! Not knowing anyone (sounds like what we're going to face in Florida), being uncertain over our adjustment (same in moving and 'starting over') and leaving others behind are major issues that over time will be forgotten as these concerns are replaced by a new life style.

I'm applauding where I am in life. While the media wants us to erase wrinkles, tone butts and defy aging, I feel great knowing I've earned my place in this new phase. I'm not about anti-aging. I'm all about aging gracefully. I'm about the wisdom I've learned through the experiences I've encountered. The obstacles and circumstances that have previously challenged me actually were strengthening. I am confident, resilient and fearless. I am looking to Phil and our future realistically and optimistically. We're in this together. We've proven in the 29 years of being together that we have all the characteristics necessary to weather any storm.

Every now and then, during quiet moments, I've also been revisiting the experiences we've had individually and collectively that will shape our next stage. Phil is a Navy veteran, a retired corporate CEO and professional speaker/author. He's also a self-taught world class photographer! I've taught, was involved in expanding a major franchise organization, served as an Associate Publisher of a newspaper, speaker/author and Founder of a national women's organization, Xperience Connections. Our combined careers lend themselves to great conversations, diverse perspectives and open the door to lots of fresh relationships with others of similar backgrounds. Just thinking about this is very exciting and definitely overrides any concerns we may face in the future. Are we positioned for an adventure? Absolutely!

We all know that aging is a process. It doesn't show up unexpectedly. It only becomes real when we allow ourselves to get real. That is exactly where Phil and I are at this moment. We're real and realistic. The window of time we have left is exceedingly smaller than we'd like to acknowledge. There are so many places yet to visit, activities to try, opportunities to pay forward and new relationships to create. Having lived together in two communities – suburban Maryland and Atlanta, adjusting to a third homestead doesn't seem overwhelming. We know about adjusting, about having to reach out instead of waiting for things to happen and feel confident individually and together that we will be met with openness and acceptance. That's one of the big attributes in living in a community with others of similar age. We've all raised kids, we've weathered retirement, we enjoy grandchildren and love seeking new possibilities. What Phil and I have at this moment has served us well. What we anticipate will do the same. Our stories will tell others about us. The stories others share with us about their lives will do the same. Who knows all the similarities that will unfold revealing areas of common ground with future neighbors!

Katharine Hepburn was quoted as saying: "I have no romantic feelings about age. Either you are interesting at any age or you are not. There is nothing particularly interesting about being old – or being young, for that matter." I can be quoted as saying, "Regardless of one's age, remaining interesting and interested are both keys to one's happiness." I'd like to believe that a 55+ community of well-established residents provides a vast array of interesting individuals. We know living joyfully is ours to value and appreciate. With our remaining years, Phil and I intend to embrace this mindset, share joy and accept that whatever was is no longer. Whatever is yet to be is up to us to create. We've learned lessons and fashioned our lives around what we've learned. The time is now to impart, to grow and to contribute. In the window of time we have left to implement our plan, we are preparing and anticipating what's ahead.

The other day I was leafing through the large community manual that represents all the opportunities at Valencia Lakes – our home to be. It amazes me how many activities are available for interested participants. I was particularly struck by the activities associated with outreach. Having volunteered over the years and most recently at Northside Hospital where I had my breast cancer treatments, I know once we settle in that participating and donating my time is

going to front and center to meaningful involvement. Being with individuals my age and engaging in worthwhile projects increases my excitement. Years ago, in my college days, I was a troupe leader for a local brownie chapter for girls with physical disabilities. The experience was humbling and rewarding. Throughout my post college/business career I spent significant time in a variety of mentoring programs. I think I have a DNA gene that leads me to enjoy, pursue and engage in outreach! Reading about the club that focuses on this specifically has definitely spurred my interest in being active.

Over the weekend, I read a fascinating article (Time – Nov '17) of a new living life style concept that is apparently laying the foundation for a different housing configuration/arrangement - referred to as: "Intentional Communities". The article, written by Jeffrey Kluger, headlines: Americans of all ages are coming together in 'intentional communities'. The format is homes or apartments built around a shared community center and other facilities. Everything is set up in a town-square format so that leaving one's space opens the door to open areas including common area kitchen, lounging, activities, etc. The article further states the following, startling statistics: 50%: Percentage increase in risk of early death among the lonely, compared with the non-lonely. The other is 42.6 million – the number of Americans estimated to be suffering from chronic loneliness.

As I read the article, I immediately thought of the situation Phil and I have in no longer feeling satisfied with apartment living and the decision to relocate to a 55+ community. Whether this type of living arrangement or an intentional community, it's clear that people need connection, seek connection and want the well-being that comes with the social activity it brings. Of course, social media continues to play an important and often disruptive role in giving people a platform to communicate. It has been beneficial to me knowing I have a window to the activities of friends and colleagues especially when geographically separated. However, It does not, at least for me, provide the satisfaction that comes from inter-active and real time relationships! I prefer face to face hugs rather than virtual ones!

There's so much about this Parker adventure that has me feeling enthusiastic, anticipatory and optimistic! Who will we meet? What club activities will make us feel engaged and involved? How often will our 'northern' friends and family visit? How will we handle the year round warm/hot weather when for all

our lives we've lived with changing seasons? Everything about the unknown is yet to unfold. Of course, I really am getting ahead of myself. So much to do before the move actually happens.

Interspersed with this anticipated excitement comes with it the realization of what we'll be leaving behind. Friendships that have endured in the 22+ years we've lived in Atlanta, the familiarity and comfort of our existing routine and what we've come to expect are all circumstances that will change. Sure, we can say some friendships will last, however, the reality is that geography often plays a significant role in impacting change. While we've only shared our plans with family, it won't be long before we'll begin to get the word out: The Parkers are moving to Florida! Certainly, people will be happy for us and say they'll visit. There will be the shock effect as well. Some couples will wish they could do what we're doing and others will be in disbelief. For example, when we downsized from 5500 square feet almost 4 years ago to our 1200 square foot apartment, we had friends who were envious. "Wish we had the courage to do this!" Or, "I want to create a less responsible, easier lifestyle, but my wife/husband has absolutely said, 'No way'." Whether acceptance or envy, to us this decision remains the same: it's what's best for us. We know and believe the adventure of doing, being and experiencing something new, albeit unknown, is our well thought out next step.

I'm not kidding myself that what we're about to undertake will require planning and effort. To meet new people, develop new ideas, talk about new things, and learn new patterns not only takes effort, but also demands focus. Of course, thoughts of what's familiar are easy and comforting. It is reassuring that life as we have known it is still there, both stable and secure. We know our current routine by heart as if on autopilot. Friends, eating establishments, shopping areas and some social activity have all brought us both pleasure and reassurance. There is at least for us, a cost for 'settling in', doing the same over and over for years and not varying off course and that in itself is reason enough for change. New setting – new everything. What once was will certainly be the platform that assures us we can create a new one. After all, *adventure* is about creating, exploring and embracing the unknown. Our lives are not over. There still is time to expand knowledge, learn and contribute. At this stage, as Phil and I age, we feel an insatiable desire to reach beyond what is familiar and secure, to

test our resilience and prove it only to ourselves, that we are still alive and open to challenges and fresh possibilities.

While not realistic, Phil and I would like to stay forever young! Sure, the years are multiplying, the body is aging and we may not rebound as quickly as we once did. However, while we are alive and have the heart and mind as our driving force, we refuse to let our chronological years define us. What we have experienced, what challenges we've overcome have collectively prepared us to live anew. We do not have the right to give up learning just because age is assumed by many to have shortened possibilities. We are about to seek a quality of life much different from our younger years. We get to change our minds, try something we've yet to do and seek those who have journeyed similarly to what has been our own route and are where we are in life right now. We will find opportunities to share wisdom, to pay it forward, to enhance our individual growth and to redefine us as a couple. We need a new environment to achieve these results. We need the experiences of others to shed new light and insights. This anticipated freedom speaks to me, excites me and makes what we have now replaceable but not forgotten.

"Old age is not a disease." Maggie Kuhn wrote. "It is strength and survivorship." There is gift hidden in the years we've had. It will shape what we will be in the future – as well as the way we will become it. I'm certainly not naïve to think that we have several years ahead. I'm realistic to accept that time is not something any of us can control. I am, however, 100% aligned with what we do must be as productive, fulfilling and worthwhile as possible in the time left. Time is a boundary, not a barrier. Sure, time limits us but it will not stop us unless we choose to be stopped. Phil and I intend to keep on keeping on as long as we have the mind and body that allows it. We'll give life our best effort until we are otherwise challenged! When that happens, we'll simply initiate a course correction.

It's been quite a while since I last wrote and that was deliberate. I wanted us to 'square away' a few logistics before continuing my journal. We've made significant progress. The biggest consideration, my mom, has been handled as we now have her wait listed at a gorgeous full care facility in the Greater Hartford Area. She's ready as in "How long do you think before I'm off the waiting list?". We're ready as well. The time is right for others to take on the responsibility of

working with her care givers. Dealing with her decline has been unsettling. This is not a complaint as I am totally grateful my mom is still here. It's the emotional piece that I find unsettling. She 'wants' to walk again in spite of no use of her right arm or leg. She keeps asking for her walker which we donated to the facility months ago. When my mother moved to Atlanta at 80 she was vibrant, driving, volunteering at a local hospital, dined out often and even had season tickets at Atlanta Fox Theatre. At 90, and in the following years, she suffered 3 significant falls, followed by hospital stays and 3 different rehab facilities for physical strengthening. She started in a two bedroom apartment, then after the third fall, moved to a one bedroom with part time care. Eventually that care could not meet her hygiene, dressing and safety needs. So, that resulted in a move to a full care facility where she continues to reside.

Watching her decline has been very difficult. Knowing that her relocation brings her closer to nearby family and a larger more comfortable space with a private bathroom and lift/shower which is going to be a blessing to everyone. Of course, we'll visit when possible. Right now it's just a waiting game. All paperwork has been complete. All inquiries on transporting her are done.

A private care giver has been arranged to be mom's escort for 3-4 days is now on call.

As I write, it's mid-January 2018. In a week we'll be returning to the Tampa Area to begin additional paper signing, interior selections for our home and a three day complimentary stay on the property, we'll be exploring and meeting current residents. This is getting very exciting and our next step toward our eventual relocation.

End of January update:

Our stay in Greater Tampa couldn't have been better. Hanging out on the property, taking more time to 'see' all that is available and meeting really friendly residents collectively has made this second go round a step up from our initial trip. I have to admit, chatting with residents in our age group, realizing we'll be meeting individuals from all over the U.S. and elsewhere is refreshing and stimulating. It just takes moments of dialogue and suddenly you discover a common thread. It's a significant departure from where we are! Apartment living, as I've mentioned previously, is a revolving door. Honestly, you invest time

in establishing relationships and the next thing you know someone you really enjoy is moving on.

This has happened to us individually and as a couple over and over again. This type of living situation simply doesn't lend itself to support and involvement, especially at our age.

While returning back to Atlanta from our one week Florida stay, it was Phil that began a dialogue around what we individually and collectively offer as a couple. It started with, "While I don't want to boast, Bon, but we really do have a lot to offer." and, I realized he was right! This was particularly evident after our second visit. Having talked with several people at the rental office, around the property, at the bistro and even at Home Depot, the exhilarating willingness and openness of 'strangers' to share experiences and offer advice was both heartwarming and reassuring. We got to thinking, after we're established, that we'll be doing the exact same thing when we meet prospective and new residents. Everyone is genuinely interested in each other, eager to meet one another and friendly. I guess I'm finding myself thinking more and more about how different life will be in Florida. I feel overwhelmingly blessed that Phil and I continue to love, appreciate and support one another. Our solid relationship gives me all the reassurance I need to move to an entirely different life and lifestyle. It's our history together that reminds me of all we've endured, all we've accomplished and all we have to offer, to learn and to experience as time goes on. There'll be no looking back except to draw on our years together. It is our shared journey that will be the foundation for what lies ahead. The same is true for all the 55+ residents/neighbors who also have their own history to share with us when they, too, choose to relocate.

It's been a few weeks since my last entry and I read an inspirational article called: "*We Continue to Grow*" and I thought I'd share some of that messaging with you. The essence of what I read is there is no containing growth. It happens whether we engage or not. Life itself is about growth. We learn, we evaluate and are exposed to different circumstances and situations on a daily basis. How we handle what we face contributes to our individual growth. We learn from mistakes and we expand when exploring new possibilities. All of our earlier beliefs and practices are the foundation of everything new. We learn what works; we learn what doesn't. We discover with each happening what best serves us. Most

journeys of discovery are a progression of insights and experiments, successes and setbacks. Collectively we grow and expand based on what we embrace and discard. The duo of the past and present combine to create our future.

Given that we are now setting the stage for an entirely new life, I'm reminded (once again) that the possibilities are endless as we come to adapt to an uncharted life. When we moved from the DC Area to Atlanta in '95, Phil and I knew no one. We relied totally on each other and the strength of our relationship to adapt and create a new life. That was 23 years ago. It's undeniable the strides we've made, the relationships we've established and the joy of having found both couple and individual fulfillment during that time. While we're much older now, just recognizing how well we do adjust and the *adventure* of starting 'fresh' fills me with encouragement. I'm not, however, going to kid myself that many will say 'moving' is a very stressful time. Everything relating to what's involved (hard as I try not to think about it) can cause stress, confusion and tension. I hope and pray that the journey and preparation will be short lived relative to the excitement and anticipation of our chosen new life. For now, I'd have to say we're in 'wait and see' mode. Of course, I won't hold back from honest reflection as we chart our course. It's still very early in the game. We won't even be on our way before August. Even so, in spite of the uncertainty, I'm writing to keep my anticipation front and center. I'm sharing to enlighten whoever might be interested in what aging, change and introspection provide.

Ten days after this last entry:

What I'm about to write came so quickly I had to blink to believe the development. Anticipating several months before my mother would be off a waitlist to relocate, imagine my surprise when my brothers, Phil and I got a one week notice. The call came that our chosen Hartford assisted living facility had an opening and it's ours if we're prepared to move forward! There was no time to think twice or consider the challenges in getting everything arranged so quickly. We were going to do whatever it took to make the transition happen in a fast, efficient and smooth manner. We did just that. One week to the day my mother and her loyal & trusted care giver were on their way Delta first class from Atlanta-Hartsfield to Hartford-Springfield. Everything was packed. All mailed items on their way. Phone disconnected. TV sent priority.

Update: My mom is now comfortably adjusting to her new space, 'new home' and life in Hartford – her birth city. She's already (it's been 4 days) been visited by both sons and her daughter-in-law *each* of the 4 days, her grandson's surprise visit from NY City, two granddaughters and one of their boyfriends! That's 4 times what we could offer during her 13+ years in Atlanta in one long weekend. So much company in such a short time and my mom is over the top happy.



As for me, I've been asked, how am I feeling given this dramatic change in both responsibility and freedom? My answer: I feel relieved. I feel free from any regret. I'm not looking back at what I could have done differently or wish I had done something that never happened. Rather, I'm looking back at a dozen plus years feeling satisfied that I was a supportive and devoted daughter and that I honored my mom through all stages of her health and subsequent decline. The timing that allows others the joy of having our mom close by as well as to share the responsibility that comes with aging parents was perfect for both Phil and I and my family. She expressed her readiness in moving, my brothers were prepared to take over her care and we needed change. It's all good. It's a blessing for everyone involved.

So, here we are, just Phil and I. We're monitoring our home's slow construction thinking about the packing and logistics we'll be facing and the excitement of this new and unfolding *adventure*. We have only shared our plans with immediate family as we're waiting until we give the rental office our two month notice. I think at that point reality will set in and the emotion of leaving everything that's become familiar along with saying farewell to long standing and enduring friends will impact both of us. Until such time, we intend to make the most of these next months – making plans, anticipating warmer weather and feeling appreciative of where we are at this very moment. Life has been very good to Phil and I. My mom is 2 months shy of her 95th birthday. With all these changes, there are also moments of sadness and anticipation.

It's all part of living well, dealing with the mixed emotions we all experience and accepting the journey as it plays out.

Hearing from my mom long distance is now a valued part of my daily routine. We touch base, share what's going on with one another and I honestly feel her happiness at being 'home'. I could never have imagined that our decision to make a significant change would result in such a positive development for my mom. She's happy and involved in many new activities. Her caregivers are special. We are at peace knowing other capable hands are now taking over the daily responsibility for her wellbeing. It's truly a mutual blessing. Our first visit to Hartford is planned for the second weekend in April (2018) when we'll be celebrating my mother's 95th birthday. For her 90th Phil and I threw her a big surprise party. We even hired a Frank Sinatra singer/look alike for entertainment. How is it possible that 5 years have passed by so quickly? I am especially grateful for all these years, that my mom's mind is sharp and witty and that we can anticipate her next milestone birthday.

It's still too early to make moving arrangements. There is no guarantee that the July-August time frame we were originally quoted is even realistic. We look around our apartment and feel a bit overwhelmed. Given that we went from a 4 bedroom home to apartment living, by comparison, this next step should be less stressful. However, it's our first long distance relocation in twenty-three years. They say moving is one of the 3 biggest stress related factors facing a couple. I'm working on replacing anxiety with *adventure*. I'm focusing on the excitement of being settled in rather than what it's going to take to get there. Hopefully, my mind will stay positive and loyal to what I want to happen by overcoming the obstacles that are likely to show up.

As of this writing it's mid-February and we're still keeping our plans to ourselves until early May when we give notice to our rental office. It's just too soon and we have enough to think about without the emotion of sharing our upcoming move with friends/community. We have such a diverse community of connections. We enjoy young couples raising children, childless couples focused on careers, business acquaintances and of course, our age group of doting grandparents. Living in Atlanta for almost 23 years is 'home'. There's no doubt when we do start our goodbyes they will be filled with a wide range of emotions – sad, happy, disbelief and excitement. Some will remain with us on our journey

and will visit while others will share simply by sincerely wishing us well. Phil has often said, “Out of sight – out of mind” and I’m okay with that. What has served us well will always live in my heart and be a constant reminder that you can never discount loving, caring and yes, even, casual connections. Every one of the relationships we’ve created has had value for us and for others. That’s good enough. Thinking ahead, we are looking forward to new ones!

The other day I cleared my book shelves of 35 publications and donated them to our local library. I’m an avid reader and I especially love non-fiction. The lessons one can learn from reading have definitely served me well. In my overall decision of what to keep and what to re-purpose, I decided that the opportunity for others to learn what these books offer was reason enough to unload them. This was only the beginning of more purging, however, and, at least, a start. I recall at the time when we moved from our home to an apartment agonizing over what to keep and what to give away. 200 books later, I have few left. The great news is that I’m making room for others to fill the empty shelves when we relocate.

Additionally, what I chose to read over the years has also changed. As with any life cycle, what was appealing during one stage no longer has the same draw. Today I’m more inclined to read books related to what is going on in my life. I’m no longer focusing on parenting, improving my communication skills or career development. What captures my attention are authors who are addressing senior life, health and wellness, history, biographies and dealing with current issues. Just as I’m writing on the essence of aging, I’m attracted to books, articles and other publications that provide fresh insights in dealing with the process of getting older! (Did I mention I love the AARP magazine?)

Phil and I live in the back building of a large apartment complex. Weather permitting, we liked to walk up the hill, have a fresh cup of coffee in the lounge area located in the rental office and converse with whoever, more likely it’s an unfamiliar face. Well, we got to talking with our favorite assistant manager and casually asked about a couple we hadn’t seen in a while. She proceeded to say they would soon be moving out and how much she’d miss them. Victoria then went happens to be there at the time. It’s also not unusual for someone we know to come by, however on to say, “I’m so happy to have the two of you here.” Phil and I looked at one another, smiled at knowing our situation would also be

changing soon. Walking back to our place afterward, we talked about how much we're going to miss our almost daily routine, the wonderful staff that we've come to respect, enjoy and who've taken care of our apartment needs. Four years of building these relationships has been a strong and dependable part of our apartment life. That, too, will be another adjustment.

Update: It's now the first week in March and we've received a welcomed and anticipated phone call. Our home is 'officially' under construction! Given the time frame originally stated – July/August turn key, it's likely to occur as planned. Somehow, and right at this moment, relocation is feeling real. With time passing quickly by, in just over four short months we will be packed and on our way. Let our adventure continue!

A few weeks have passed and it's becoming more challenging to NOT tell friends, colleagues and neighbors about our plans! Phil and I've agreed to the firm 'tell all' date of May 1st! We've made our list regarding who needs to know ahead of others and then we'll make the official announcement. Eager to see the construction progress, we'll be once again returning to Tampa at the end of April about a month from now. We have several contacts/decisions to make during this next visit. Arrange storage facility, order refrigerator, visit Chamber of Commerce to name a few! Phil came up with a great idea to rent an SUV so we can transport small boxed items on our own rather than include them with our large moving shipment. We'll do this when we visit in June.

Lately I've been questioning my adjustment given that for the last 22+ years I've been immersed in women's issues, mentoring and training. This is one of the reasons I want to see what the local chamber offers. Maybe there will be speaking opportunities for me, younger professional women to mentor or other engagements that will keep me connected to my passion. I guess I'm starting to wonder whether the social activity of our new community will feel as fulfilling as what I'm used to. On the other hand, one of our goals in moving is to explore new avenues, new activities and to be involved in yet to be determined arenas. I suppose my ambivalence is normal. No doubt, every one that has moved from their familiar surroundings to a 55+ community has probably asked the same questions, "How easily will I adjust?" "What will my neighbors be like?" "Will I find joy in 'letting go' of what 'is' to what is yet to come?" It's obvious this waiting period is proving to be unsettling! Wish it were all ready here.

On a different note, my mother has made amazing progress since returning to Hartford. She sounds terrific. She's involved in daily activities. She enjoys the spontaneity of family visits, Thursday field trips and her apartment-size residence. Yes, I miss her. It's different not having our regular Sunday together time, stopping by unexpectedly and visiting her along with the friends she had while living in Atlanta. Hearing how happy she is, I can't help but think that her life is actually being extended because of the wonderful experiences that returning home have provided. It's all good and I am free to do as I please w/o balancing work time with mom time along with her necessary appointments. I'm at peace with this and, frankly, it's nice to be missed! I have no regrets.

So much has happened since my last entry. It's now mid-April. We've returned from Hartford having spent time with our family in celebration of my mom's 95th birthday. It's our first visit since her move and she's doing great. We have nothing holding us back as we've seen firsthand her excitement in her new home. She loves it and her care givers are fabulous. Our turn for a new life is not far off.

Our realtor keeps us updated with pictures as the construction progresses. We can see our foundation, outer walls, roof and inner walls. We're leaving soon to check out developments, make necessary purchases and familiarize ourselves with the neighborhood. During the upcoming days in the Tampa area I've even scheduled an appointment to check out the Sun City Chamber of Commerce! Hey, the business side of my life still has pull on my time. Will have to see what they offer and if the local Chamber is a good fit. After all, hopefully I can at least do a few 'Lunch & Learn' sessions and sell a few books!

I've now emailed the following open letter to our wonderful friends letting them know our plans. While we shared our move with family, we didn't share it with friends until recently as we were waiting until construction was well underway and the time frame set. We've come to that crossroad. (May 1, 2018)

To our dear Friends –

First of all, Phil and I would've preferred reaching you individually, however, the time involved simply didn't allow us to connect one on one. We have news that is likely coming as a huge 'surprise', 'change' and, in some cases, a 'shock'! We are leaving Atlanta after almost 23 fabulous years and building a

home outside of Tampa! This has been a long, ongoing conversation and the universe lined up in ways we couldn't have imagined...

A January visit to spend time with long standing friends in Sarasota, Florida got the ball rolling. With a window to their 'retirement' life, we recognized that being in an environment more in line with our stage (age?), a lease that expires July 1st after 4 years of apartment living and my Mom's comment every now and then of wanting to return 'home' to Hartford – all lined up favorable to us embarking on a significant change. We did our homework. We explored several 55+ communities after two separate visits and decided to build a home from ground up. By mid-July we will be Florida homeowners...(Mom is thrilled w/her new life in Hartford)

You are receiving this because of the value we place on our friendship, because we wanted you to hear from us directly and it comes with an invitation to visit us should you want to as time goes on. One of the challenges and disappointment with apartment living is the cost to have a larger space for entertaining and for overnight guests. Our new home – 2100+ square feet has as a top priority a beautiful second bedroom. Once we settle in, we'll be setting this up anticipating company! Our home is open style, huge sunroom and the community is gorgeous: www.GLHomes.com (Tampa/Valencia Lakes). It has abundant activities, 44K square foot community complex with entertainment space, multiple classrooms/meeting areas, 3 pools, full state of the art gym, etc. The walk around the lake is 2 miles which is perfect.

So, this change represents our next adventure. We're very excited and trust you are happy for us. Please stay connected! Bonnie, aka, Sassy Grandma and Phil, aka, Sexy Grandpa.

I have to say that writing has always been my best avenue for self-expression. Not only does it help me to focus, to sort out feelings and bring me comfort and clarity, it also provides me a way to be open, honest and share in whatever way it might help the reader. Every day we are all faced with choices and in some cases decisions that have a major effect on our future. Some of you might be dealing with care giving, with dissatisfaction with work or your surroundings. Some of you have had to deal with compromise – shortchanging yourself for what you desire in order to bend to circumstances.

Whatever major change may be facing you, writing can help you in your decision making. When I wrote my e-book: *Discovery and Recovery*, journaling about my breast cancer journey, it helped me heal. I could identify progress, applaud how I handled my situation, acknowledge key players and remain focused on the one thing that was my single most important responsibility – trust in the outcome by believing I would come through the ordeal. That’s *exactly what happened! My faith and positive attitude didn’t fail me.*

I’m not going to kid myself that for Phil and I this next step is not a big one. I’ve previously addressed this challenge several times. As I look back at the beginning of this journey and where I am at this moment, I get to remind myself how far I’ve come and how grateful I am. We’re making progress. We evaluate the pros/cons of our choices whenever we have to make decisions and we remain unwavering in our positive outlook. (If only I could get the challenge of packing out of my mind!)

The beautiful month of May is upon us and we’ve recently returned from another Florida visit. Progress on our home is really coming along and although it appears that it could be finished in July, we’ve been told that’s unlikely. Between interior detailing, groundwork, getting approvals along the way and occupancy papers, mid-August is more realistic. Oh, well, looking back to when we first started and where we are now, our actual move really doesn’t seem far off. We did stop by The Sun City Chamber and experienced a very warm and informative visit. They have a large, active membership and a robust calendar of activities. It’s our intention to join once we settle in. I suspect after the Summer months, businesses gear up and members get busy beginning in September which will be a perfect time to get involved.



With each trip, we’re getting more familiar with the area and all what’s available. Traffic wasn’t as bad as we’d experienced previously. Of course, it’s now hot during this time of year in the south and lots of Florida residents, referred to as snowbirds, have settled North during these next few months enjoying cooler climates. So, less traffic is more of a tease than reality! (Hopefully, the roads will be empty when we arrive end of August!) I’m

sure that traffic will be impossible during the months when the snow birds return to the South! (Phil insists we won't be leaving the complex throughout the winter except for essentials) We'll see about that.

Since sending our 'open letter', we've received numerous well wishes and genuine sadness over our leaving. One by one, whether through our direct correspondence or 'word of mouth', our community and connections are hearing about our plans. Several friends have already said, "We are definitely visiting." We welcome the company which has been such a major loss in apartment living. We also intend to re-up our membership in The Evergreen Club. (www.TheEvergreenClub.com) We were active throughout our 17 years as home owners and had to give that up when we didn't have a guest bedroom. The Evergreen network provides its membership (50+) overnight home hospitality (bed/breakfast concept) for \$20/night. While we've established several friendships over those years, we also look forward to hosting new couples. It's now mid-June and I wanted to do this entry sooner, however, construction delays have moved our potential closing date to the end of August or early September. This 'holding' position is unsettling! Effective July 1st, we're now on a month to month lease in our apartment. With estimated moving costs in hand, we're now playing the waiting game. Phil and I are obviously frustrated. We can't start packing as we simply don't have room to stack boxes, I've already staged a brunch/farewell reception for business associates but hesitate to make any future arrangements without a more definite moving date!

Having more time on my hands has given me too much time to think. My excitement early on is being somewhat offset by the anxiety of everything that we need to do. As I look around the apartment (at least we did downsize from a large home 4 years ago) I feel a bit overwhelmed with the tasks facing us. Somehow, even with living in a much smaller space, we've 'collected' a lot of stuff. If we don't pack breakables ourselves, the cost of having movers do it is beyond ridiculous. So, do we pay the price as do it yourselves (stress, perhaps?) or pay the price and leave the task to the moving company? Needless to say, I'll be relieved when this step is over.

As we move slowly along with our plans, my mom continues to experience a happy life in Hartford. Keeping busy with ongoing activities, weekly outings, company almost daily and missing us (that's a good thing!) easily fill her days.

We're going back to Hartford for another visit the end of this month. As I mentioned earlier, we spent time there for her birthday in April. Once we move, it's not likely we'll be making another trip until October or November.

Dealing with the energy and time it takes to handle logistics definitely has a way of disrupting my normally balanced self. It's uncharacteristic of me to think from a 'what if' perspective or have 'second doubts' around decision making. This process and all the paperwork, disclosures, and delays, however, is taking a toll. Every day requires another decision. Then there's change of address cards to do, obtaining copies of medical records, realizing we'll be faced with new doctors, dentists, hair stylist, nail salon and buying furniture to replace what we sold 4 years ago to name a few 'still to do' tasks. From a more rational perspective, I realize that 90% of the Valencia Lakes residents had to do the same thing and managed to live through their ordeal. I guess getting older, recognizing that we *chose* to relocate to a Florida 55+ community and to get from where we are to where we want to be requires a different mindset. I'm working on mine. That, too, is exhausting!

From a perfect timing perspective, the other day a dear friend emailed me a document focusing on 'an excellent list of 21 statements on aging'! I have to say I agree it's filled with good advice so I thought I'd pass it along with a few of my own comments in *italics*. Reminder: I have not created the list....I'm simply passing it along...If it doesn't serve you now it will one day. Time passes quickly and your day will come.

1. It's time to enjoy and use the money you saved up. Don't just keep it for those who may have no notion of the sacrifices you made to get it. Remember there is nothing more dangerous than a son or daughter-in-law with big ideas for your hard-earned capital. Warning: This is also a bad time for investments, even if they seem wonderful or fool-proof. They only bring problems and worries. This is a time for you to enjoy some peace and quiet.

2. Stop worrying about the financial situation of your children and grandchildren, and don't feel bad spending your money on yourself. You've taken care of them for many years, and you've taught them what you could. You probably helped with their education, food, shelter and support. The responsibility is now theirs to earn their own money.

3. Maintain a healthy life, without great physical effort. Do moderate exercise like walking every day, eat well and get enough sleep. It's easy to become sick, and harder to remain healthy. That is why you need to keep yourself in good shape and be aware of your medical and physical needs. Keep in touch with your doctor, have regular checkups even when you're feeling well. Stay informed.

4. Always buy the best and most beautiful items for your significant other. The goal is to enjoy your money with your partner. One day one of you will miss the other and the money will not provide any comfort. Enjoy it together

5. Don't stress over little things like paying a little extra on price quotes. You've already overcome so much in your life. You have good memories and bad ones, but the important thing is the present. Don't let the past drag you down and don't let the future frighten you. Feel good in the now. Small issues will soon be forgotten.

6. Regardless of your age, always keep love alive. Love your partner, love life, love your family, love your neighbor and remember: "A man is not old as long as he has intelligence and affection."

7. Be proud, both inside and out. Don't stop going to your hair salon or barber, do your nails, go to the dermatologist and the dentist, keep your perfumes and creams well stocked. When you are well-maintained on the outside, it strengthens you on in inside. It will make you feel proud and strong.

8. Don't lose sight of fashion trends for your age. Emphasis on age! Keep your own sense of style. There's nothing worse than an older person trying to wear the current fashion among youngsters. You've developed your own sense of what looks good on you – keep it and be proud of it. It's part of who you are.

9. ALWAYS stay up-to-date. Read newspapers, watch the news. Go online and read what people are saying. Make sure you have an active email account and try to be active on some of those social networks. You'll be surprised what old friends you'll meet. Keeping in touch with current events and with the people you know is important at any age.

10. Respect the younger generation and their opinions. They may not share the same ideals as you, but they are the future and will move the world in their

direction. Give advice, not criticism. Try to remind them that yesterday's wisdom is still valid today.

11. Never use the phrase: "In my time." Your time is now. As long as you're alive, you are part of this time. You may have been younger, but you are still you having fun and enjoying life.

12. Some people embrace their golden years, while others become bitter and surly. Life is too short to waste your days on the latter. Spend your time with positive, cheerful people. It will rub off on you and your days will seem that much better. Spending your time with bitter people will make you older and more difficult to be around.

13. If you have a choice, do not surrender to the temptation of living with your children or grandchildren. Sure, being surrounded by family sounds great, but we all need our privacy. They need theirs and you need yours. If you've lost your partner), find a person to move in with you and help out. Even then, do so only if you feel you really need the help or simply do not want to live alone.

14. Don't abandon your hobbies. If you don't have any, find one. You can travel, hike, cook, read, or dance just to mention a few. You can adopt a cat or a dog, grow a garden, play cards, checkers, chess, dominoes or golf. You can paint, volunteer or just collect certain items. Find something you like and spend some real time having fun with it.

15. Even if you don't feel like it, try to accept invitations to graduations, birthdays, weddings, and conferences just to mention a few. Try to go. Get out of the house and meet people you haven't seen in a while. Experience something new or something old. However, don't get upset when you're not invited. Some events are limited by resources, and not everyone can be hosted. The important thing is to leave the house from time to time. Go to museums, go for a walk through a field. Just get out there.

16. Be a conversationalist. Talk less and listen more. Some people go on and on about the past, not caring if their listeners are really interested. That's a great way of reducing their desire to speak with you. Listen first, answer questions, but don't go off into long stories unless asked. Speak in courteous tones and try not to complain or criticize too much unless you feel it's really

necessary. Try to accept situations as they are. Everyone is going through the same challenges, and people have a low tolerance for hearing complaints. Always find some good things to say as well. 17. Discomfort and pain go hand in hand with getting older. Try not to dwell on them but accept them as a part of the cycle of life we are all going through. Try to minimize them in your mind. They do not define you, they are something that life presented to you. If they become your entire focus, you lose sight of the person you used to be.

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18. If you've been offended by someone; forgive them. If you've offended someone; apologize. Don't drag around resentment with you. It only serves to make you sad and bitter. It doesn't matter who was right. Someone once said: "Holding a grudge is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die." Don't take that poison. Forgive, forget and move on with your life.

19. If you have a strong belief, savor it. But don't waste your time trying to convince others. They will make their own choices regardless of what you tell them and it will only bring you frustration. Live your faith and set an example. Live true to your core values and beliefs and let that memory sway them.

20. Laugh A LOT. Laugh at everything. Remember, you are one of the lucky ones. You've been gifted with a long life! Many never get to this age and never get to experience a full life. But you did. So, what's not to laugh about? Find the humor in your situation.

21. Take no notice of what others say about you and even less notice of what they might be thinking. They'll do it anyway. You should have pride in yourself and what you've achieved. Let them talk and don't worry. They have no idea about your history, your memories and the life you've lived so far. There's still much to be written, so get busy writing and don't waste time thinking about what others might think. Now is the time to be at rest, at peace and as happy as you can be!

REMEMBER: “Life is too short to drink bad wine and warm beer.”

“You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.” -Winston Churchill-

I told you I thought it was a great list.



Now, back to the task at hand. We’ve been extremely busy with packing, completing the paperwork needed to finalize our mortgage and making the necessary purchases. We now have two additional fans, ceiling fixtures, new phones, etc. Our small apartment looks like a UPS Store! Boxes, bubble, tape, unprinted newsprint wrapping paper and flow pack everywhere! We also had to rent 3 storage closets on our floor at \$50 each per month to accommodate boxes we already packed! So, we pack and move stuff down the hall. Next day we do the same. As every box is packed and moved we get closer to finishing the task.

The physical progress we’re making together is quite different than the mental progress I’m experiencing. One day I feel really excited and ready. On another day I try to stop focusing on what I’m leaving behind. The comfortable routine we’ve established during the last 23+ years while living in Atlanta is soon to change. We recently received the official word that our closing day is set for August 29th – less than 3 weeks from this entry. We started the process in December, 2017 and now it’s ‘around the corner’ and soon we’ll be Florida residents.

The ‘ole neighborhood gang recently threw us a “farewell party” Friends have extended brunch, lunch and dinner invitations and on multiple occasions we’ve repeatedly been told, “We’re going to miss you!” I don’t expect our new

life will significantly impact me until we close the apartment door for the last time, get in the car and head south to our new home. If you had asked me, even as recent as a year ago, if I'd ever relocate from Georgia, I would've said, "There's no way". This just goes to show you that life and circumstances can unexpectedly change and the journey you've been on can be replaced with a journey yet to be traveled.



Months of waiting have turned into weeks and now we're in the home stretch. Early on Phil and I have divided up our to do list. He's been taking care of all the stuff related to financial arrangements for the mortgage, moving & crating logistics, water, electricity, tv and our mobile accounts both here and in Florida. I'm pretty much the designated packer! Together, we're getting the job done and, honestly, it's not been too stressful just all consuming. As I write this entry, we're on official count down. We are one week away from settlement and ownership! As I mentioned earlier, our apartment is stuffed. We have kept a narrow pathway open where necessary. Every corner is filled and even our small appliances are carefully packed. We're ready for the moving van to arrive in just six short days from now.

While, I'm pleased with all we've accomplished, it's the reality of right now that has me feeling emotional and sentimental. As I began months ago to look at this change as our next 'Adventure', at the time it seemed far into the future. The future has arrived and I'm facing leaving what will be to the journey ahead. No doubt as you read this, my current situation is probably not unlike similar situations you've faced along your way. From single to married life; relocation to accept a new job; embracing parenthood just to name a few. The life we've experienced living in Atlanta have far exceeded expectations. We both knew no

one. We became professional speakers and authors, got involved in community endeavors, engaged in what will be lasting friendships and grew closer as a couple. Phil significantly expanded his love of photography and I established a woman's organization which is now celebrating its 16th anniversary. No doubt our life in Florida will also prove rewarding, worthwhile and productive. Once we get established and learn our way around, I certainly don't doubt everything will become comfortable and familiar. It's just getting from where we are looking toward the future and what will unfold that remains unknown! Then again, every person that's relocated to where we'll be living has gone through the same journey and survived!

It's now the weekend before the move and excitement is building at the Parker residence. The crating company came today and 8 works of art are now ready for relocation. We watched the process and were quite fascinated how they took one item at a time and built boxes to insure a safe journey for every piece! The hallway outside our apartment door is lined with crates. There was no way they'd fit in our already tight living space. They are extremely heavy so it's unlikely anyone will attempt to steal them!

Tomorrow, our faithful handyman is coming to disassemble our custom closet shelving, remove the fans and finish other odd jobs that we don't have either the tools to handle or simply the patience to watch Phil attempt to do what he can't!



(Having fun & considering another way to get to Florida!)

I just have two more workout times at LA Fitness and two more nights in our apartment. How did 23 years go by so quickly? How did 4 years since we downsized happen so fast? No doubt, as you age, you have the same thoughts. Time is going by quickly and what once seemed like having years ahead of you, has now caused you to recognize that the number of years remaining are becoming less and less. I think that is part of the urgency Phil and I considered in making our decision to move into a more age appropriate community with an abundance of activities to enjoy. We talked at length about how we wanted to spend our future and what would bring us the most joy and fulfillment. We agreed that a change would be healthy for us both as individuals and as a couple. So, here we are, at the beginning of our adventure with optimistic anticipation. In 2 ½ days a moving van will be here and we will be bidding Atlanta farewell!

It's now August 28th and we've arrived. We go through our final walk through and closing tomorrow! We're excited! We're nervous! We hope all will go without a glitch. I'll sign off for a while and resume developments after getting through the unpacking and setting up of our new home! Here's to smooth sailing without any major challenges!

It's September 12th and I can't believe two weeks ago we were in boxes, bubble, flow pack and crates. Now, we're actually relaxing and enjoying our beautiful new surroundings. (Check out our house warming gift: Matching mugs that say, "We're Flamingoing"!) Hey, this is Florida; flamingos are everywhere. 'Go with the flow' as they say.

I have to say we lucked out in a lot of ways. The movers were excellent. The handyman we hired did painting, hung light fixtures, fans and artwork. We met two entrepreneurial guys who took all of our moving materials to the recycling site for a nominal fee. We actually had an empty garage in 4 days. Of course, this was in large part to an inefficient cable company which took 5 days to finally get us up and running. Not having internet or TV turned out to be a blessing. After my husband ranted in his typical male frustration mode, we made substantial progress! (Do all men have a tv gene? Just asking!)

We established our very first Florida friends on our moving day. I noticed a truck up the street, unloading just like what was happening at our place. So, I grabbed Phil (he was reluctant and that's no surprise) and headed up the street.

We knocked on the door, got invited in (what choice did they have) and we both knew immediately a long-standing relationship was about to unfold. This was on a Wednesday. Got invited for dinner with 2 other couples two days later. I actually located my favorite wooden bowl and provided the salad. Those 3 couples set the stage and as Florida newcomers we already began to feel connected.



Over the next few months we focused on our to do list: Motor Vehicle, locating the nearest Costco, asked around for recommendations for an internist, dentist, etc and familiarized ourselves with the clubhouse, scheduled activities, and eagerly began to establish our routine. In addition, during this time period, Phil made a major decision and I was thrilled to give him my full encouragement. He decided to volunteer for the Sun City Emergency Squad as a first responder and signed up for their extensive training program. After 6 weeks of classes, practice, tests and learning how to drive both the van and the ambulance, Phil earned full status. His commitment is a full day every 8 days and he loves it.

It's been nine months as of this writing since the Parkers have become Floridians. We've gotten involved (volunteering), done quite a bit of entertaining including 5 Sunday "Brunches at the Parkers" developing a total of 15 new couple

relationships, joined clubs and had several out of town visitors. We've learned our way around, done a bit of exploring and are currently going through training to be volunteers at the Straz Theater, which is the main theater complex in Tampa. An event highlight was celebrating Phil's 80th birthday (May 10th) for an entire weekend ending with a large surprise party on the 13th. Honoring Phil was a 6-week planning effort and worth every moment of time and energy. As usual, he had no idea about my plan including his first cousins and friends that traveled from DC and Atlanta to wish him well.

Time and experience have shown that accomplishment and power are not a guarantee for success. Being busy is not the same as feeling alive and that happiness is not an achievement but a choice. Time and my younger days also serve to remind me that change happens, progress unfolds and that I can appreciate what was and be ready to welcome the unknown. I feel certain that what was meant to be is happening right now. Embarking on this journey without knowing quite where I'm headed has given me the freedom to be open and curious, eager to find out, rather than obligated to uncover or implement the 'right' way to do something that my younger years expected.

A few closing remarks to think about!: *"Getting older is no problem. You just have to live long enough"*. Groucho Marx

"Old age is like everything else. To make a success of it, you have got to start young". Fred Astaire

If it's true that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, then it certainly must also be true that laughter is the best medicine. Fun quotes on old age are not only humorous, but also are imbued with a certain level of truth that can only be appreciated over a lifetime. If you take nothing else away from funny and inspirational quotes on senior aging, let it be this: you don't have to stop living your life as you get older. Quite the opposite, in fact, it's yours for the taking. Don't resent the fact that you're aging, revel in the excitement!³⁷³⁷

Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art. Eleanor Roosevelt

About the only thing that comes to us without effort is old age. Gloria Pitzer

You can only perceive real beauty in a person as they get older. Anouk Aimee

There's always a lot to be thankful for if you take time to look for it. For example, I am sitting here thinking how nice it is that wrinkles don't hurt.
Unknown Author

For the unlearned, old age is winter; for the learned, it is the season of the harvest. Hasidic Saying

To be seventy years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be forty years old.
Oliver Wendell Holmes



As I come to the end of my [*Reflections on The Essence of Aging*](#), it is my wish that you will embrace all that your life has experienced, give yourself permission to venture forth in uncharted waters and have the peace of knowing you've earned this moment of where you are right now! I started out sharing that I wanted our move to Florida to be an adventure. It continues to be one with evolving new experiences, emerging friendships and adjustments. It remains a time of growth and planning. I'm grateful and blessed that this 'new' life has proved to be both rewarding and fulfilling. Phil and I didn't embrace this dramatic and uncertain change with any guarantees.



We ventured forth with faith in our decision and the strength of our individual and couple experiences to fortify us for our future in Florida. May you also age gracefully and be rewarded for a life well lived (so far)! Never fear adventure. It's in venturing out that new possibilities and experiences find their way into your life.

