

## Wise Aging: Moving from a Paradigm of Decline to a Paradigm of Possibility

BY RUTH ROSENBLUM, LCSW

"I'm looking forward to not working so hard, but I'm also worried that I'll have too much time on my hands. What if I'm bored and end up regretting my decision to retire?" So began the WJCS Wise Aging group's discussion on "Retirement."

Another group member continued: "I have similar concerns. I don't want to waste the time I have; but besides playing tennis and spending more time babysitting the grandchildren, I'm not sure that I know how to use my time in meaningful ways. I don't want to end up watching TV all day." Heads nodded as other participants voiced similar sentiments.

Then the oldest group member, 91 years-old Edna, said: "Listen, you don't need to worry about having too much time. As you get closer to my age, you move so much more slowly and everything takes so much longer that you begin to realize you don't have nearly as much time as you thought you'd have."

Silence.

Then peals of laughter as the 17 group members, mostly in their 60's and 70's, realized the truth and wisdom of Edna's comment.

This is a typical scene from the Wise Aging program:

laughter, lively discussion, intimate sharing, peer support, active learning, new friendships, and much, much more.

The Wise Aging program, which is being offered and facilitated by WJCS at several local synagogues, was developed by The Institute for Jewish Spirituality and is based on the book of the same name - *Wise Aging: Living with Joy, Resilience and Spirit* - written by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Jewish educator, Dr. Linda Thal. The program addresses the social, emotional and spiritual needs, challenges and opportunities offered by this later stage of life -- sometimes referred to as "the third chapter", "elder hood" or "active aging."

In addition to addressing health, retirement, loss and other topics associated with aging, the program provides opportunities to acknowledge the many positive possibilities of aging: the chance to cultivate qualities that help individuals age with greater ease and joy; the opportunity to review, repair and resolve life issues and troubled relationships; and the possibility of doing more of the living and learning still remaining. [For me, I finally went on a trapeze at age 62!]

To quote from the book, "Ours is the first generation in human history to move into elder hood with 20 years or more

of vitality and good health ahead. Once our lives are no longer primarily driven by nurturing family and building careers, we have the chance to make wise choices about how we spend our time, energy and money. What does retirement mean now when many of us may still be working - by choice or by necessity? What does retirement mean now that there are so many opportunities for learning, for care, for serving? We can redefine aging.

As the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 60's and 70's helped redefine the roles of women in the US and across the globe, the Wise Aging program is helping to redefine and enhance the experience of our individual aging as well as the role of older people at this time in our history.



*If you are interested in learning more about WJCS's Wise Aging groups, email Ruth Rosenblum, LCSW, at [rrosenblum@wjcs.com](mailto:rrosenblum@wjcs.com) or call 914 761 0600 x148.*