

# DISCUSSION GUIDE



*When Did I Get Old:  
Reflections on  
Aging Today*

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## *Discussion Guide*

*When Did I Get Old: Reflections on Aging Today* was produced by WFYI Productions in partnership with the University of Indianapolis Center for Aging & Community and the Indiana University Center on Aging and Community, with cooperation from Indiana Grant Makers Alliance and the Indiana Division of Aging, and with support from the Daniels Fund in Denver, Colorado.

### *University of Indianapolis Center for Aging & Community*

The University of Indianapolis Center for Aging & Community collaborates, educates, and conducts research to enhance the quality of life for all people as they age. As a center, we seek to be a catalyst for change that leads to a world in which all people age with dignity and optimal health.

### *Indiana University Center on Aging Community, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community*

The mission of the Indiana University Center on Aging and Community is to provide leadership that enables older persons to lead self-determined lives within their communities. The Center promotes practices that ensure access to opportunities for meaningful, productive, and healthy lifestyles in livable communities.

### *Indiana Grant Makers Alliance*

The Indiana Grantmakers Alliance is a membership organization dedicated to advancing philanthropy throughout Indiana by promoting legal, ethical, effective, and efficient grantmaking.

### *Indiana Division of Aging*

The Indiana Division of Aging (DA) establishes and monitors programs that serve the needs of Indiana seniors. In addition, the DA performs a wide range of functions designed to enhance comprehensive and coordinated community-based systems serving areas throughout the state.

## *The Daniels Fund*

The Daniels Fund partners with individuals, organizations, and communities to recognize people's inherent value, develop abilities, and provide opportunities that will allow every individual an equal opportunity to live a healthy, productive life.

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- The Morrow Family

*Did you know?*

## A LOOK AT INDIANA'S AGING POPULATION IN 2009

- Did you know that in 2009, 1 million Hoosiers are age 60 and over?
- Did you know that in 2040, 1 in 5 Hoosiers will be 65 or older?
- Did you know that 39% of older Hoosiers volunteer and 27% remain in the Indiana workforce at either part- or full-time capacity?
- Did you know that 52% of Indiana's older adults have lived in their communities for more than 50 years?
- Did you know that 94% of Indiana's senior population would like to remain in their current residence as long as possible, but 39% of them are not very confident they will be able to afford to do so?
- Did you know there are six NORCs in Indiana? A "NORC," which stands for Naturally Occurring Retirement Community, is a community not originally built for seniors, but one in which a significant proportion of older adults now lives for whom services/programs are offered/coordinated within the community. You can find them in Gary, Huntington, Indianapolis (2), Linton, and South Bend.
- Did you know that 22% of Indiana seniors care for a family member or friend who cannot do things for themselves because of illness or disability?
- Did you know that Indiana has 45 adult day centers, providing a variety of health, social, recreational, and therapeutic activities, giving much needed respite to family caregivers? Visit [www.iaads.net](http://www.iaads.net) to locate an adult day center near you.

- Did you know that there are 16 Area Agencies on Aging in Indiana, each charged with providing information and services to seniors, the disabled and their caregivers? Contact 2-1-1, an information and referral service, to locate the one closest to you.
- Did you know the Indiana State Bar Association has an Elder Law Section? Visit [www.inbar.org](http://www.inbar.org) to find an elder law attorney near you.
- Did you know that 85% of Indiana's elders have voted in local elections in the past three years—and that 27% do not feel local policy makers have taken into account the interests and concerns of older people?
- Did you know that many of Indiana's colleges and universities allow senior citizens to take classes at no charge and offer discounted admission to cultural performances? Call the registrar's office or performing arts center of your nearest college for more information.

## INTRODUCTION

As Judy O'Bannon explains in *When Did I Get Old?*, we begin to age at birth, eagerly anticipate getting older until we are 21, and then develop wide-ranging responses to what it means to age. The responses are as unique as each person! Are we excited or apprehensive? Do we tell our true age or hover at one for a period of years? Are we full of dread or full of delight? Do we see possibilities or dilemmas? Is there creativity or concern? Are we living fully or living with limits? What do we look forward to each day?

One thing is for sure: we are aging, and unlike any other generation in the history of the United States, most of us will outlive our parents by many years—even decades. This fact alone makes each of us pathfinders and path-makers. Our collective responses to aging will challenge communities, families, congregations, policy-makers, health systems, social service providers, and many others to be open to change. It will require us to consider possibilities and discover new ways to be responsive to needs and opportunities. As individuals, we are charting our own journeys, discovering what it means to take on new roles, living in ways we'd not planned, seeing dreams realized, and shifting expectations. As community organizations, as neighborhoods and as communities, we are charged with building, strengthening, or retooling the supports and opportunities that enable older citizens to live fully and with satisfaction for all their years.

*When Did I Get Old?* was developed by WFYI Productions under the guidance of the University of Indianapolis Center for Aging & Community and the Center on Aging and Community at Indiana University. The goal of the production is a simple one: to provide examples of aging that cause us to examine assumptions, explore possibilities and make plans for personal and community action. We've chosen to stimulate discussion by looking thoughtfully at *perceptions* about aging, the importance of *purpose* in our lives, the impact of *place* on our quality of life, and how we *prepare*, as individuals and as communities, for our aging.

In the DVD you will meet individuals who are living lives of purpose, challenging perceptions about aging, finding ways to make places to live more accommodating, and being thoughtful about how to prepare for the future. You'll meet families, civic leaders, artists, planners, social service directors, educators, adventurers—and some Old Farts. In discussions hosted by Diane Willis in WFYI studios, you will hear conversations about perception, purpose, place, and preparation. Some of the conversation insights and recommendations require a simple change of mind, and some suggestions require a change in policy, programs, or places. You may watch the DVD as a complete show, or watch specific chapters.

### *Chapters include:*

**Overview**

**Perceptions**

**Purpose**

**Place**

**Preparation**

### *Suggested Audiences*

This DVD and discussion guide may be used as a training and educational tool. Sample questions have been developed for each section. *When Did I Get Old?* is designed for use with adults, or youth and adults in a variety of settings including conferences, workplaces, classrooms, neighborhood meetings, congregations, community agencies, service clubs, and social groups. It will invite conversation in family rooms and in board rooms. We encourage viewers to respond to questions first as individuals, and then to extend their thinking by sharing ideas with congregations, communities, organizations or families about what it will mean for those communities to age.

## *Suggested Use*

While the DVD is just under 60 minutes, the discussions and planning it sparks may take hours or even years. Choose a segment of interest and review the questions.

- Choose some questions that meet your particular objective, and pose them over coffee; or challenge students to explore via reflective dialogue.
- Use the questions as part of a planning effort or policy review.
- Incorporate the film and the questions into a conference session or a staff development day.

We encourage you to use the DVD and the discussion guide as a way to kick off community planning initiatives by setting the stage for an examination of current realities.

- Invite artists to watch a segment and draw, sculpt, or write the impressions they have.
- Take a neighborhood walk and inventory work that might be done.
- Assess your building for senior-friendly attributes.
- Have older adults ask questions of each other, or encourage youth to interview the elders in their family or congregation.
- Host a neighborhood meeting, and use the dialogue to begin a community buddy program.
- Use some of the questions at your next family reunion.
- Create journals and reflect on one question a day.
- Use the questions as conversation starters at the next potluck dinner or book club meeting.
- Plan a study group around some questions.
- Use them to spark Internet research about opportunities for service.

The action you take with these tools may be grand or modest, but it will make a difference!

## SECTION ONE: OVERVIEW

In this section, viewers meet people who describe their ideal retirements. Some wish to be active and strong. Others want to be surrounded by loved ones, ensconced in a porch rocker with tea and people dropping by. Some want to garden, have fun, be in fellowship with others, and go on adventures. For some, however, those plans must be adjusted: economic or health concerns, an inaccessible home or community, and lack of supportive networks all make aging a challenge.

Viewers will also hear comments by Judy O'Bannon, Indiana's former First Lady, film maker, and community leader. She will encourage us to consider what it means to reinvent oneself, especially after relationships are altered and capacities are diminished.

- As the show begins, you hear people's responses to what they want to do when they retire.
- How do you imagine your retirement? What words would you use to describe it?
- How do communities, policymakers, media, businesses, and social service providers characterize retirement?
- What does it mean "to retire?" How does that concept affect our emotions, esteem, or expectations? How does it affect others' perceptions of an older adult?
- The answer to the question "what am I to do?" changes as we age. Consider the decades of your own life. How did the answer to that question change? How can you imagine it changing as you continue to age?
- As policymakers, business leaders, health practitioners and others age, how might their experiences affect our society?

- Using those you know as examples, describe what it meant to age 40 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago, and now. Compare and contrast these answers. What would you like to see 10 years from now? How can you make it happen?
- Judy O'Bannon shows us photos of four women, all in their 60s. What words would you use to describe each of these photos? What descriptors would you use to describe men of a similar age in each of those time periods? How do they compare?
- Answer the question, “when did I get old?” for yourself.
- How has technology, health care, and changing expectations affected our views of aging as individuals? Consider the broader social implications of these topics for your community, company, social group, or family.
- Consider the power of words: senior adults, mature, aged, old, senior citizen, elder, aging, and other terms. What does each of those words convey? Why? How do these words affect how we respond as individuals or as communities or policymakers?
- What happens when one views aging as a destination? How does it differ from viewing becoming older as a journey? How do you characterize your own process of aging?
- What happens when policymakers, communities, or families characterize aging as a destination? As a journey?

## SECTION TWO: PERCEPTIONS

Using the overview as a springboard for discussion, Diane Willis leads the panelists into a conversation about perceptions of aging. It's been said that perceptions are reality, and we'd encourage you to explore yours—and those we share as a community and culture.

- Consider the wide range of images you see in the media of men and women as they age. What do you think of those images? How do the images of men and women differ as portrayed in the media? As you answer the question, consider persons in their 60s, 70s, 80s, and older.
- What do you think of Dr. Sease's assertion that 65 now seems to be an arbitrary age for retirement? When do you imagine yourself retiring—or have you retired? Explain your reasoning.
- What will it mean in our country if older adults remain employed longer? What are the effects of that kind of shift? What are the benefits? What are the possible drawbacks?
- Tell a story about someone in your family or neighborhood who was old. How did they handle their old age and how has that influenced your perception of aging?
- Consider, as one of the panelists suggests, the hills and valleys of aging. Are there any that have affected you? What did you learn from the experience? How have these changed your outlook? What have you learned from others' hills and valleys? Where does one develop resiliency or strength?
- What happens as we age and experience hills and valleys simultaneously? What supports are needed? What systems of support exist? How can systems of support be enhanced or developed?

- Do our current systems and policies seem adequate or are they based on perceptions that are no longer accurate? If you were 10, 20, or 30 years older, how would you answer these questions?
- The panelists suggest that experience shapes perceptions. What stories can you tell of individuals in your life whose perceptions, or those of others, limited them as they aged?
- What stories can you tell of individuals in your life whose perceptions created few limits?
- Think of the groups you belong to: a workplace, a congregation, a social club. How do perceptions of the culture of the group or of individuals in those groups affect the outcomes? How have those changed over time?
- Shirley Webster claims that interaction with others can affect one's perception, and that for her, connection with youth matters. What have you learned about working with youth, older adults, children, animals, or the environment that affects your perceptions of aging? How do such actions change the perceptions of others?
- How do our perceptions change when what was once possible is no longer possible?
- At what age does one sense there is more behind than ahead? And how does this affect your outlook on life?

## SECTION THREE: PURPOSE

In this section, we discover that one of the important elements of aging is purpose. It may be a dream or desire one looks forward to experiencing, and we meet three older adults who are enjoying their own “extreme sports!” Purpose may take other forms, including work, service to others, caregiving, imparting wisdom, or sharing a special talent. Purpose can connect us to others and give us a reason to get up in the morning.

- What do you wish you could do that you haven't done? What's stopped you? What stops others from accomplishing a long-held dream?
- Some might consider skydiving, piloting a plane, or driving a race car risky business at any age, but how does our understanding of risk and adventure change as we age?
- Courage comes in many forms. In what ways do individuals display courage as they become older? What small acts require special courage?
- How can we help others to be courageous?
- Mack Wilson checked himself out of a nursing home because he felt he had important work to do. What do you think might have propelled him to take on the challenge to “offer something to others?”
- How might Mack Wilson's work and purpose lead us to challenge assumptions we hold as individuals or as a community?
- How can we help others discover or claim their purpose? Consider this as an individual and as a community or group.
- Dr. Anita Siccardi enlisted in the military at age 50 to be a nurse in the Gulf War. She states that “purpose is life. Without it life is empty and we are powerless.” Do you agree with these statements? Why or why not?

- What are the implications of lack of purpose and powerlessness for our community and culture?
- Tina McIntosh meant no harm when she took laundry home to fold, but the outcome was devastating to Miss Susie: Tina took away her purpose. Yet, as people age, others often take their responsibilities away. Can you describe instances of that happening? What has been the outcome? What are the issues surrounding such decisions?
- What is implied by Father Hardin's question, "What will you be when you grow up?" How would you answer that question? How has that changed for you over time?
- What gifts do we acquire as we age that we can share with younger persons? How can we do that with grace?
- Fred Kelley has been the dean at Arsenal Technical High School for 41 years! What is the effect of his purpose on that school community? How does it shape others' expectations of that school?
- How do communities, businesses, congregations, and other settings affirm or suppress the purpose individuals feel toward others?

## SECTION FOUR: PLACE

In this segment, viewers meet neighbors who have learned an important lesson about team building, sharing work, and making a community for older adults. Mayor Jones has taken on the challenge of mobility in Linton. At Joy's House, guests find hospitality every day, and viewers might try hard to wrangle an invitation for three-generation pool and pasta at the Hebenstreits' home. Panelists explore where one feels a sense of place, where one finds it, and what contributes to it.

- Consider neighborhoods in your community. What contributes to them being hospitable or unfriendly for older adults? How many seniors (and others) can walk to a grocery store or a restaurant in your community?
- What remedies might be sought to make a community more welcoming for older adults?
- How well is your community, your neighborhood, your faith organization planning for the aging of our society? Who gets involved? Whose business is it?
- Are older people at the heart of your community or relegated to the margins in senior housing or other age-segregated environments? Why?
- Gary Midtown NNORC has found a powerful link between neighbors working together to clean things up and a feeling of safety. Have you seen such a link at work in your community?
- Consider the resident who commented that when she felt safe, it made her want to do things. What are the small and large implications of such a statement?
- In Linton, the focus is on mobility for older adults. How easy is it to maneuver in your home? Neighborhood? Community? What does increased mobility mean for an older adult? Does a "senior van" solve all the mobility problems of those who don't drive?"
- What are the benefits of services like Joy's House to guests, families, and communities? If there are not such programs where you live, how can you provide similar supports?

- Family matters to the Hebenstreits. How do we make places in today's culture for family experiences and rituals? How does that change if parents are no longer living in their own homes? How can families retain and nourish that intimacy that comes from sharing space?
- What makes a place a home? How does that change as someone ages?
- How does memory help to create a sense of place?
- What does Dr. Stafford mean when he says "the community calls out a response in us?"
- Suburbs, urban areas, and rural communities each present challenges and opportunities for older adults. What are some of these? Are there common solutions that might be considered?
- Evansville has discovered that what makes a community work well for older adults also helps youth thrive. What might those elements be?
- Dr. Stafford cites data that indicates that part of what people value in their community is the opportunity to spontaneously interact with others of all ages. How can your community, congregation or neighborhood develop such opportunities?
- How do you feel about "gated, active adult communities?"
- Have you needed to help a loved one move from home, where they hoped to age in place, to a different setting? What did that require of you? What did it require of your loved one?
- What is required for an older adult to age in place? How can supports and opportunities be built?
- How does a front porch help a senior age in place?
- What makes an environment safe but challenging, so that there is a balance between risk and safety? What does that mean in an individual's home and in a community?
- What does your community do to make driving or transportation safer and more convenient scenario for older adults?

## SECTION FIVE: PREPARATION

Diane Willis and the panelists note that planning and preparing for the future is an important element of aging, both from an individual and a community perspective. Exercise, for instance, can strengthen muscles and bones and lessen the possibility of falls. Attorneys and families should confer about advanced directives, wills, and finances. Communities might consider mobility for older adults: how walkable are the neighborhoods and how available, reliable and affordable is transportation? Preparation can also mean being intentional about being social or creative. And yet, we are reminded that the best plans may need to be quickly adjusted.

- We see examples of people strengthening their bodies, exercising their creativity, enjoying fellowship, and sharing laughs. What motivates people to do these things? What prevents people from participating? How can we increase accessibility to opportunities for aging adults?
- One of the Old Farts notes that it's important to fight depression, cynicism, and pessimism. What steps can we take as individuals, groups, or communities to improve the mental health of older adults? How can persons develop their own strategies for positive outlooks? Assess your own mental health; is there room for improvement?
- It's important to have legal documents in order, financial plans made, and health decisions in writing, but these can be difficult conversations for a family to have. Tell of your own experiences with such conversations. What has worked? Who has been most reluctant to have them, those who are older or those who are younger? How can we help families have these conversations?
- Dr. Toft notes we often plan to answer the question "what if we die?" However, he also asks us to consider "what if we live?" Which question is harder for us to answer as an individual? As a family? As a community?

- Many of us will live into our 80s or 90s, so beyond the legal and administrative concerns, how does one prepare for opportunities and engagement in later years?
- Sometimes one of the important steps in preparation is to become more resilient or flexible. How does one practice or acquire those skills?
- Sometimes a system or a community must find ways to help build supports for older adults to become resilient. What might those be? How can a system itself develop the resilience that might be needed for changing circumstances? Who should be around the planning table?
- As noted earlier, having so many people age at one time—and to such late ages—is new for civilization. What lessons do you hope we teach along the way? How can we do this well? Are there other cultures we can learn from?
- Many people describe a change in spirituality as they age. Has that been your experience or your observation? What has occurred?
- We've used several terms to describe aging: one might find a path, see aging as a journey, or experience it as an adventure or expedition. Which of these fits your ideas best? What steps, then, should you be taking to prepare?
- Diane Willis notes that successful aging seems to require a combination of compassion, common sense, innovative thinking, new behaviors and change in public policy. All of that requires talking, listening, and thinking. What opportunities do you have, or can you create, to initiate this dialogue in your personal life and in the wider community?

## CONCLUSION: WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

It's amazing that one 60-minute documentary can elicit so many questions for discussion, isn't it? We hope that the points raised in this film and in your discussion groups are the springboard for many fruitful conversations about aging—with your families, members of your church, community groups, and your city leaders.

There are numerous resources available to individuals and organizations who would like to delve further into the “Four Ps of Aging:” perceptions, place, purpose, and preparation. We encourage you to explore them further:

### *Perceptions*

- *American Perceptions of Aging in the 21st Century* ([https://www.ncoa.org/Downloads/study\\_aging.pdf.pdf](https://www.ncoa.org/Downloads/study_aging.pdf.pdf))
- *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, by Thomas R. Cole. 1992. Cambridge University Press.
- *The Gathering of the Wisdom People* ([www.wisdompeople.org](http://www.wisdompeople.org)). An online exhibit
- *What are Old People For?* by William H. Thomas, M.D. 2004. Acton, MA: VanderWyk & Burnham.

### *Place*

- *Elderburbia: Aging with a Sense of Place in America*, by Philip B. Stafford. 2009. Westport, CT: Praeger Press.
- NORC Blueprint: A Guide to Community Action, ([www.norcblueprint.org](http://www.norcblueprint.org))
- National Age in Place Council ([www.ageinplace.org](http://www.ageinplace.org))

## *Purpose*

- American Society on Aging's Civic Engagement Program (<http://www.asaging.org/asav2/civicing/index.cfm>)
- *Encore: Finding Work that Matters in the Second Half of Life*, by Marc Freedman. 2007. Public Affairs, Perseus Press.
- *Leadership for Older Adults: Aging with Purpose and Passion*, by Sandra A. Cusack. 1998. Routledge.

## *Preparation*

### **Personal Preparation:**

- *Successful Aging*, by John W. Rowe, M.D., and Robert L. Kahn, Ph.D. 1998. New York: Pantheon.

### **Community Preparation:**

- *Re-creating Neighborhoods for Successful Aging*, by Pauline S. Abbott et al. Baltimore,MD.: Health Professions Press.
- National Research Center: Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (<http://www.n-r-c.com/services/CASOA.html>)

## *General*

- University of Indianapolis Center for Aging & Community, <http://cac.uindy.edu>
- Indiana University Center on Aging and Community, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/cac/>

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