



Solo Ager

Boomers Without Kids

By Sara Zeff Geber, Ph.D



Until very recently, the percentage of childless women hovered around ten percent. Very simply, it was the rate at which women were unable to reproduce. All but a tiny percentage of women did marry and did attempt to bear children – until about 1970.

That date coincides with the arrival into adulthood of the first wave of baby

boomers with their unique ideas about how to pursue the adventure of life. Fast forward to 2011...the rate of childlessness among baby boomers is almost 20%!

As baby boomers, we were the first generation to truly liberate women from the role of wife and mother. Thanks to the introduction of the birth control pill, increased access to higher education and equal employment laws, many baby boom women didn't depend on a man to provide the livelihood and the nest in which they would raise their children. In addition, many women began to question whether they wanted to be mothers.

The culmination of these forces was an almost doubling of the rate of childlessness. This means that one in five adults is a "Solo Ager." What will that mean for this new older generation?

It's true that some people age without debilitating mental or physical ailments but health problems of one sort or another begin to afflict people with dramatically higher frequency as the decades mount.

So, if you are now in your 50s, 60s, or 70s, and do not have children, you should start to think about your future as a "Solo Ager." And let's face the fact that even if you are married, one of you is going to be left alone at some point in the future.

We will all need people around us who care about us and that we trust. Begin now to think about how you can reinforce your social support system while you are still active and have lots of choices.

Here are some things you can start now:

- 1. Arrange to live near one another.** If you do not already live close by, research some communities you can all afford and would be a good place to age. There are already some examples of groups that have built their own communities called "co-housing," and others that have gone together and purchased whole (small) apartment buildings or triplexes. You do not need to go to these extreme lengths. You may decide on a senior housing development that already exists or even a one-story tract of homes in a nearby small community that is engaged in a "Village" model. Living next door is the ideal; barring that, get as close as you practically can.
- 2. Create legal documents.** Consider using "durable powers of attorney for health and finances," listing one another as successors to spouse, if you are married. That way, if you are the remaining spouse, someone who knows you and cares about you will make decisions on your behalf when you no longer are able.
- 3. Keep the door open.** As you age, encourage (relatively) younger people to join your group and incorporate them into the planning. You might also consider collectively hiring a geriatric care manager to oversee your collective and individual situations and offer advice as your needs change.

The most proactive step you can take now is to continue (or begin) growing your network of friends. You probably already know people who are also Solo Agers and they will likely be very interested in these ideas just as you are. Additional candidates might be neighbors, fellow church- or synagogue-goers, like-minded hobbyists, professional colleagues or people you've known since childhood.

As the baby boom generation continues to age, new paths will be charted and new models for living will be designed. This is a generation that is just now re-inventing retirement.

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