

In the 1970s I began to think about the importance of the continuing effectiveness and contributions of older persons. I wrote about it in some detail in my book *Why Survive? Being Old in America* (1975). It was not until I chaired the Salzburg Seminar in Austria in 1982 that I began to talk directly about “productive aging”. I had been asked to build a seminar around dependency in old age. I argued that it would be a step forward to consider a more positive side of aging. I had remarkable colleagues at Salzburg including the great Swedish geriatrician Alvar Svanborg, the pioneer in the psychology of aging James Birren, Betty Friedan who represented the lives of women and wrote the famous book *The Feminine Mystique* and Herbert Gleason, secretary of the Salzburg Seminar. I encouraged them and the Salzburg fellows to think positively about aging.*

I did not interpret the concept productive aging to be formal work. I believe that even the

bedridden person can be productive, helpful to their caregivers. I consider taking care of oneself to be productive. The principal concept of productive aging is to remain constructive in relationship to the larger society and immediate environment as long as possible.

Of course, society in turn has to be respectful of age and provide opportunities for older persons to remain in constructive relationship with their environment for as long as possible.

I think the downside to productive aging is if it is only seen as work. This was not my intention.

As I look into the future of the concept I wonder if productive engagement might be a more effective term, not just suggesting work but alternative activities, self-care and so forth. My hope is older people will remain constructively involved and engaged in society to advance quality of life and length of life.

* Butler, R.N. and Gleason, H.P. *Productive Aging, Enhancing Vitality in Later Life*. Springer Publishing Company, New York, 1985.



His friends in the world...