



BOOK CHAPTER: **The Long Life Promise**

(3 pp) 1700 words

Pete Townsend of *The Who* was only 20 years old in 1965 when he penned the words, “Hope I die before I get old,” a phrase that became the rallying cry for an entire generation. Well, like Townsend, those of us from that generation are now getting, ahem, on in years. What we’re *not* getting is old. Old is our grandmother, who was bent and shaky before she turned 60. Old are the people sitting in wheelchairs in nursing homes. Old is the 70-year-old man who stays in his house and talks to his cats all day, in between soap operas.

As for the rest of us – we’re just getting started. And that’s what *Long Life Prescription* is all about. It’s about vibrancy, creativity and energy at any age. It’s about understanding that although we all have to die one day (and pay taxes), we don’t have to get old. Instead, we can be like the ultimate Boomer himself, Townsend, and release a new album when we’re 61 (or higher), only in our case that new “album” may be a new career, a new home, a new relationship, or simply taking up skiing.

The thing is, you don’t need hormones and pills to live the good life – no matter what your age. In fact, we’re here to tell you that “age” is neither a disease to be treated nor a process to be reversed, denied or defied. Instead, it’s a process to be respected and enjoyed. For only with age can you reach the maturity, wisdom, success, enjoyment and happiness – yes, happiness! – that the young ‘uns lack. Major studies prove our point – the young *aren’t* happier; overall, happiness increases with age.

And you know what? That happiness isn’t based on how much money you have in the bank or even on how healthy you are. Instead, it’s based on your overall underlying emotional resources, resources that grow stronger with age.

The key is to get rid of outdated ideas about aging as a slow decline towards death and about “anti-aging” as longevity. The truth is that how *long* you live isn’t the issue; it’s how *well* you live. After all, would you rather be 97 and lying incontinent in a nursing home or 68 and still playing doubles tennis? Seventy-two and running for public office for the first time? Eighty-one and completing a four-mile hike through a boulder field? We’re not making these things up; these are all activities that real people, real “old” people, are still doing and enjoying. Heck, we know of one centenarian who plays 18 holes of golf three times a week and consistently shoots 15 strokes under his age!

Bottom line? You are part of a generation that is redefining aging. It’s already happening; when approximately 3,500 people with an average age of 80 were asked about their ideas about aging, more than 60 percent said their thoughts about aging had changed in the past 20 years. Nearly all had thought about how they could age successfully instead of viewing aging as a negative thing. To them, freedom from disease, being able to function

independently, and remaining actively engaged with life were critical components in successful aging.

In addition, more than 90 percent of this group listed “remaining in good health until close to death” as the most important component of successful aging. After that followed:

- Being able to take care of myself until close to the time of my death
- Remaining free of chronic disease
- Having friends and family who are there for me
- Being able to make choices about things that affect how I age, like my diet, exercise, and smoking
- Being able to cope with the challenges of my later years
- Being able to meet all of my needs and some of my wants
- Feeling satisfied with my life the majority of the time
- Being able to act according to my own inner standards and values

Notice anything missing? Less than a third chose “Living a very long time,” as a component of successful aging. In fact, that statement was *last* on the list of 20 components of successful aging. ¹

Obviously, we’re heading into a new world of aging. There are no road maps or rules for this new world. But never fear: You won’t be alone. Worldwide, the number of people 65 and older is increasing faster than any other demographic, particularly in developed countries. By 2030, 12 out of every 100 people will be 65 or older, nearly double the percentage in 2000. In North American and Europe, that figure will be one out of *five* people. And throughout the developed world, those 85 and older are the fastest growing age group *now*.

In this new world, retiring to the golf course is being replaced with part-time, flexible work; active volunteering; new interests and new friendships. Sedentary vacations like bus tours and cruising the islands are giving way to bike trips through the wine country; volunteer missions to build houses in South American; and mini-college semesters to Harvard learn about the Middle East.

In this new world, you’re less likely to find yourselves living with a disability or in poverty than your parents and grandparents, and more likely to have completed college – all markers for successful aging.

This is a world in which you’re OK with the changes time has wrought on your bodies as long as your spirit remains robust. A world in which you finally figured out that there’s more to good health than being free from disease or injury. And a world in which our old perceptions of about aging – that cognitive decline and frailty are inevitable, for instance – have been turned on their head.

It’s also a world in which the past *can* be changed, at least when it comes to harmful habits and activities. Even if you got frequent sunburns in your youth (remember baby

oil?), drank a lot, or, gasp!, smoked pot, the damage can be managed and minimized, as you learn in Chapter 00. So yeah, maybe you wish you'd eaten less junk food, quit smoking earlier, done more to protect your bones and joints, and worried less; we're here to tell you it's never too late to change and to see the benefits of those changes. That's what *Long Life Prescription* is all about.

When it comes to aging well in this new world, surveys show your main worries are staying mentally sharp, keeping your energy and vitality, and maintaining your wellness throughout this next stage of your life.

We're here to help. Although we can't promise you'll never have a health problem as you get older, we *can* help you minimize the impact of any of those problems on your life. We can also help you wake up feeling optimistic, strengthen your connections to friends and family, keep your mind sharp, have fewer aches and pains, feel more energized, be healthier, reduce your risk of serious health conditions and, possibly, live longer by offering a path to long health, one day at a time.

1. Phelan EA, Anderson LA, LaCroix AZ, Larson EB. Older adults' views of "successful aging"--how do they compare with researchers' definitions? *J Am Geriatr Soc*. Feb 2004;52(2):211-216.



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