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### **Old age one of life's greatest blessings**

I went to a birthday party last week at a swanky restaurant. After years of kid birthday parties in the park or at a burger joint, this one was very refined and they served "adult beverages" as my Dad used to call them. It was a ninetieth birthday party for my friend, Ruby, a woman I greatly admire.

To reach the age of ninety is quite an accomplishment, but to reach it *and* have enough friends to close a restaurant during the lunch hour to accommodate them all, is remarkable. I was proud to be included in her circle of friends.

After a wonderful meal, we all got down to the business of toasting our friend. Many people were close to Ruby's age and had known her for more than fifty years. I had met Ruby, and her husband Henry, in 1989 when I was manager of the Heath Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Project (HICAP), and they were volunteers.

After I left the agency, my husband and I got to know Ruby and Henry on a social basis. We spent evenings together talking about music, theater and books. My husband and I decided they were our fantasy parents. They never changed our diapers, or spanked us, or grounded us. They never kissed our little heads as we slept. Most important, they never disappointed us, as parents always do, and we didn't disappoint them, as children always do.

Henry died several years ago and Ruby sold their family home and moved to a retirement community in Sherman Oaks. On the first Friday of every month, I picked her up and we went to dinner and then to services at the Synagogue for the Performing Arts at the American Jewish University in Bel Air.

I looked forward to our evenings together because I was always inspired by Ruby and

how she lived her life. She was an avid bridge player, and started a drama club at the retirement community. She took a parking lot owner that towed her car to Small Claims court, and won.

She went to San Jose a few months ago to attend an Elder Hostel that taught seniors how to do stand-up comedy. After losing her mate of sixty-two years, Ruby was determined to go on living her life, with all its challenges and joys.

During the testimonials at the party, Ruby's friends described how devoted she and Henry were during their long life together. Some people (me included) were moved to write our testimonials in verse. A trio of ladies from the retirement community sang a song, and her son gave a loving tribute. At the end he proudly proclaimed that his mother was on her third computer.

I think we have the birthday celebrations backwards. Children, who make it through their first year doing almost nothing for themselves, have birthday parties that are quite extravagant and costly. The parents are exhausted, and broke. The honoree is clueless.

As we grow older, and become age-phobic (check out the assortment of "you are old" greeting cards at the drugstore), no one wants a big party. Some poor souls get an "over the hill" fortieth birthday party. But once you get past sixty or so, people just don't think of throwing a special birthday party. There may be some reasons why.

When some people get to their golden years they become so grouchy, dour and crotchety, that nobody wants to throw them a party. Sometimes they are alienated from the kin that might have the idea to celebrate. They can take a cue from Ruby and try to be pleasant, or at least positive.

When Ruby got up to speak, she said she was happy to hear such nice things said about her while she was still here. At age ninety, she had a good point.

In this season of Thanksgiving, I count Ruby as one of my blessings. In our youth

worshiping culture, I cherish my wise old friend. I am grateful that Ruby's son and daughter-in-law threw such an elegant party for their mom, and I am very glad I was invited.