

SHAMSHER PRAKASH FOUNDATION

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WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT

The clue to longevity is, of course, good genes, but one can achieve a long, healthy life by good habits, a well-rounded diet and an optimistic outlook on life. *I work at, and have achieved, serenity.* If you have the capacity to think, you know that there are calamities you cannot control and must endure. To worry about them before they occur, or afterward, *is to abuse oneself.*

I have wiped worry out of my life. I refuse to dwell on real or imaginary catastrophes. When they do occur, I allow myself 20 minutes – no more – to brood over them.

I am grateful for inheriting good genes. Three years ago, I realized that I kept repeating, “What did you say?” when spoken to. I then acquired hearing aids. Deafness is not a bad handicap. At night when I remove my hearing – they are almost invisible during the day – the silence is delicious.

I also wear a brace on my left leg, which is also invisible. Forty-six years ago I was operated on for a ruptured disc in my spine, and several nerves in my leg were severed. I had no after-effects until two years ago when I kept turning my ankle and falling. I never injured myself, but my knees were as scabbed as a 10-yearold’s on skates.

The orthopedist told me I had two choices: replacement of the ankle bone, a procedure not as wholly perfected as a hip or knee replacement, or a brace. “By the way, how old are you?” he asked. He looked surprised when I told him. He grinned. “You have one choice,” he said.

The brace fits into my shoe and fastens behind my knee. I never take my shoes off during the day, even when I lie down to rest. I walk with confidence with the added support of a cane.

I still love to travel. This winter I flew to Sarasota, Fla., for the opening of my dearest friend’s one-man art show, and will fly down again next may to Miami for the graduation of my youngest grandchild from law school.

For 17 years I have shared a house during the summer with my artist friend and her husband in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where, 15 years ago, she and I started the first bilingual newspaper. I had hoped to visit this summer, but hazardous weather there prevented my trip.

I get around the city by the bus and take taxis only at night and in bad weather. The moment I drop my fare in the box, some one – usually a woman – offers me a seat. Children, especially babies, smile at me. I guess I look like everyone’s grandmother. Strangers on buses and on the street waiting for the lights to change talk to me. Young men hold doors and help me cross streets, and offer to carry my bundles.

Yes, being 90 is a blessing and a privilege. To see your children and grandchildren become adults is a joy, but to watch your great-children grow up is the ultimate happiness.

There is still one adventure ahead of me that is the *greatest experience of all – the only perfect happenstance in life, with no strings attached, no loose ends. Absolute perfection. That is death.*

I think of it as the perfect ending to a long, happy life.

-Anonymous