

▣ The Baby Boomers' Boom

This month, the first members of the largest generation known on earth - the post-war baby-boomers – turned age 65. Their influence upon society remains strong. Regarding food, many have come to regularly enjoy a variety of ethnic foods. Both men and women have developed a degree of culinary skills and prepare their own meals. Their daily eating habits are not fully entrenched, even if curtailed by medically-prescribed dietary regimes. They most likely carry the expectation that an invitation to try a new food, flavour, restaurant or brand will be forthcoming from friends, family members, restaurateurs and grocery retailers. Merchants beware – keep biases in check!

▣ Forced Retirement Got the Pink Slip

The saying “Never trust anyone over 30!” was first quipped by a US political student activist during the radical ‘60’s, but became widely believed to have been uttered by one of the Beatles, suggesting that anyone over the age of 30 could not possibly write decent music. The notion that one’s productive abilities are limited by their age is unlawful in modern society. In 1978, the US Congress outlawed mandatory retirement before the age of 70 and in 1986, mandatory retirement was completely abolished. Canada, several decades behind the USA, banned mandatory retirement in 2009.

▣ Back to the Future

Many baby boomers embrace retirement years with the expectation that life, in all its facets, will continually improve. Many restraints of the past – familial, societal and geographical – will be behind them. Longer longevity can be liberating:

“[Ageing] should be for the better because it is being partly driven by a wonderful thing: people are living ever longer. Life expectancy has been rising by two or three years for every ten that pass, despite repeated forecasts that it was about to reach its limit. Centenarians used to be rarer than hens’ teeth; now America alone has 100,000 of them. By the end of this century the age of 100 may have become the new three score and ten.” The Economist. “Ageing in the rich world” June 25, 2009.

▣ Pension Plan Re-think

Initial pension plans were based upon an age of entitlement beyond the average lifespan of the payee. Thus, little to no payout was expected:

“When Otto von Bismarck introduced the first pension for workers over 70 in 1889 [in an area which is now Germany], the life expectancy of a Prussian was 45. In 1908, when Lloyd George [in the UK] bullied through a payment of five shillings a week for poor men who had reached 70, Britons, especially poor ones, were lucky to survive much past 50. By 1935, when America set up its Social Security system, the official pension age was 65—three years beyond the lifespan of the typical American.”

In year 2005, life expectancy estimates for North America were: ♀: 80; ♂: 74; \bar{x} : 77.

▣ Is a Longer Life Worth Living?

While some social scientists predict that future life spans will surpass age 85, others have begun to methodically assess the quality-of-life at issue in this trend. The concept is referred to as “dependent-free life expectancy”, also known as “healthy-life” “active-life” “disability-free” and “functional” life expectancy. The terms refer to the number of years that people in a given population can expect to live in reasonably good health, with no or only minor disabling conditions. Statistics Canada “uses the measure of dependence-free life expectancy to ask whether the additional years of life gained over the last century are being lived in good health”. Food industry be forewarned: people who fit this demographic will expect to receive, and will very much enjoy, good and wholesome, and occasionally indulgent, food. As an octogenarian+ friend advises at the bottom of her e-mail messages: “*Protect the earth – it is the only planet with chocolate!*” FF

▣ Some Websites

<http://www.economist.com/node/13900145>

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=11-008-X20000025167&lang=eng>

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