



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### INTERGENERATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

“Hey!” he shouted across the parking lot, “Do you want to get a cup of coffee and chat sometime?”

I met Will when I was an intern with a community organization during my master’s program and he was an active participant in that organization. I was in my mid-twenties and Will was in his early-seventies. I was just launching into my career in a helping profession and Will had recently retired as a

banking executive. My first child had just been born and Will was celebrating the college graduation of his fourth grandchild. Our friendship began with an invitation for my wife, Diane, and I to join Will and his wife for a lovely dinner at their home. Soon after, we began playing golf together on a monthly basis. We went on occasional outings to see a minor league baseball game or to grab breakfast at his favorite spot in town. He became a dear friend to me — and I’d like to think I was one of his dear friends as well.



The power of inter-generational friendship is remarkable. Will became a mentor who taught me more than I would’ve imagined about work and life — and living a healthy balance between those oft-competing spheres. Shirley, Will’s life partner, once told me that I became Will’s entre into an entirely new field. Our families shared life celebrations together and we formed a bond of friendship that changed both of us.

In a recent article entitled “Escaping ‘the old fogey’: Doing old age through intergenerational friendship,” sociologist Catherine Elliott O’Dare and her colleagues contend that intergenerational friendship is an integral part of ageing in a meaningful, everyday way. The qualitative research study pointed to three specific benefits of intergenerational friendships identified by the senior participants in the study. First, the intergenerational friendship helped the older partner fight off their perceived fears of “getting older,” in particular those socio-cultural stereotypes of ageing that participants are “afraid of becoming.” One of the study’s participants, Brendan, spoke about how his intergenerational friendships helped him “stave off the typical effects of retirement/ageing.”

The second benefit of intergenerational friendships highlighted in the research study was the “continuing expansion” rather than “contraction” of knowledge, interests, and goals. Hugo, who has been retired for nearly ten years, continues to participate in a group comprised of folks over fifty who are at various stages of the journey towards or through retirement. The group meets bi-weekly to discuss current affairs, financial markets, and other related subjects with the benefit of providing inter-generational friendships. “This group helps me continue to broaden my scope in life and creates tremendous friendships that have sustained me throughout my late professional life and my retirement.”

Finally, intergenerational friendships foster a sense of belonging and connectedness — with other individuals and with society as a whole. The study contends that “intergenerational friendship is a conduit to continued societal connectedness and belonging for aging adults.” Being an older intergenerational friend, the study discovered, “was imbued with seeking joy, belonging, and connectedness in everyday life.”

While this study helpfully articulates the benefits of intergenerational friendship for older adults, it stops short of addressing the benefits from the perspective of the younger relational partners. My friendship with Will truly changed my life in powerful ways. Not only was Will a mentor for me during the early stages of adulthood, he became a trusted confidant and encouraging guide. Even though Will has been gone for quite some time, I still remember fondly our conversations and the laughter shared on the golf course. I am truly thankful that he took a risk and invited me for a cup of coffee. It’s a cup of coffee that I will never forget. I wonder who you might invite to join you for coffee? It just may change your life!

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