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Message

Recently, a report by the Committee on Ageing Issues (CAI) estimated that between now and 2030, Singapore will witness an unprecedented and profound age shift. The number of residents aged 65 years or older will multiply threefold from the current 300,000 to 900,000 in 2030.

By then, one out of every five residents will be a senior. These numbers have made ageing issues even more pertinent to us as a nation and to us personally as a people. It will force us to re-look at the views we have held about ageing.

In the past, when the average life expectancy for developed countries was around 65, middle age would range from 30 to 35. But today, middle age is 40 to 45. These days, 70 is young and people are still active and healthy at 80 and beyond.

According to the Department of Statistics, 26,000 people in Singapore now are aged 85 and above. Life expectancy here is 81.8 years on the average. What this means is that we need a paradigm shift where age and ageing are concerned.

Seniors should no longer be seen as people who have done their part and go quietly into retirement. In reality, we are all ageing, whether we are ageing from 24 to 25 or 79 to 80. It is only the attitude that makes the difference. And what a difference it makes if we see ourselves as young and active at 80! It means that we have placed no limits on ourselves and that we can continue to live fully, regardless of our age.

Lifestyles and systems will need to change as demands from the seniors change. We need to prepare for longer and more active ageing. To ensure that we remain healthy as seniors, we need good health plans and provisions, both public and private. Lifelong learning becomes a key to keeping seniors mentally active, and engaging and contributing to society.

Living longer also means that we now have more time with our families and grandchildren (and even great grandchildren) than before. Strong and healthy emotional ties are key to a happier and more involved ageing lifestyle. This is what “Letters From Grandma & Grandpa” is about. The writers who have contributed to this book are all pioneers in the active ageing movement. Although most of them are retired, they continue to play active roles in their community as volunteers, and in their families, as guardians to their grandchildren and custodians of family and societal values.

In these letters, grandparents who have experienced much in life share their stories, insights and love with their grandchildren, and with readers in general. These are their legacies, and ours as a nation.

Having an increasing number of senior citizens in the population also means that a nation is coming of age. The collective wisdom and experience of a country's elderly can be very powerful knowledge capital.

I am happy to be part of this project together with the National Library Board (NLB), Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), and my fellow committee members. I hope this book will further strengthen the connection between the young and old in Singapore.