

**Action Pact, Inc.**  
www.Culturechangenow.com

# Culture Change in Practice

## "What I've Learned"

Thursday, October 12, 2006

Posted by Steph Kilen at 2:36 PM



**"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.**

**[www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html](http://www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html)**

Esquire magazine has a regular feature titled "What I've Learned." In it, they list the knowledge of the featured person. They've done sports figures, movie stars, CEOs, musicians and even a warden on Death Row. This month they feature Antonio Pierro, World War I veteran and retired jet-enginemaker, 110, Swampscott, Massachusetts. (Read it at < [http://www.esquire.com/features/articles/2006/061005\\_mfe\\_November\\_06\\_Pierro.html](http://www.esquire.com/features/articles/2006/061005_mfe_November_06_Pierro.html)>) It seems obvious - if you are looking for some good lessons go to someone who has had a lot of them. George Foreman can tell you lots of lessons about boxing and home indoor grills, but Mr. Pierro, whew - where do you start.

People struggle every day with all that it means to be human. You would think that someone who has been doing it for 110 (or even 80 or 74) years would have people lining up at his door with offerings looking for some small wisdom. But, we know that is not the way it works. Now, I'm not saying age brings brilliance, clarity or even good intentions. However, 80 years is roughly 30,000 days and there is a good chance that one of

those days included a fight with a spouse, a loss of hope, a triumph (big or small) or maybe even a plumbing problem. I don't know about you, but I'd really like some guidance from someone who has been through it.

Of course we are trying to change institutional nursing home culture, but we must also change the culture of our society that supports the institution that denies home and choice for elders. I probably don't even have to say it, but we do this by honoring elders and valuing their experiences - by seeing every year as a treasure.

Back in January of 2005 we posted "Maturing With Soul" by James D. Henry on this blog (Read it at [http://www.actionpact.com/weblog/archive/2005\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.actionpact.com/weblog/archive/2005_01_01_archive.html)) and asked for your answers to "What Are Elders Good For." We received this thoughtful [response](#) (see page 2). I invite you to share this with your organization and to also post your own additions in the comments. Taking every chance to remind ourselves and others of "what elders are good for" will help raise the awareness of their value to our society.

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## "What I've Learned" Response

[Peace@graceworks.org](mailto:Peace@graceworks.org) wrote:

**Old people teach us valuable lessons to remember in life, so we won't make the same mistakes.**

I remember like it was yesterday, my grandmother who was in "Who's Who of American Women" said a year before she died, "I did not do very well." I knew what she meant as I was a by-product of divorce along with my other 6 siblings who managed to exist in a troubled home. Nana had tried so hard to get things to make life easier for my mother, her only daughter by buying a washing machine and dryer, buying the land our home was built on, buying our first real bikes, buying our first communion dresses, taking us out to eat at special restaurants, and buying, buying, buying, and helping our Mother to get out in the business world with her wonderful singing ability that she had nurtured her entire growing years, so she could make more money. I lost my brothers and sisters to divorce when the family was split in two. I lost my mother too. At age 9 she moved away with my only sister to babysit our new baby sister, when mom was singing at night.

My own mother's wise words who said two years ago, "Your father and I would probably still be married if it weren't for Nana helping us so much. WOW, that hurt! She is now 83

**Old people teach us, that relationships are the glue to life.**

Visit any nursing home and in desperation, an unknown hand will reach out to you to please come and spend some time with me. Talk to me. Please come back with every ounce of life they can muster.

**Old people teach us that when you are ignored, you learn to not exist.**

For those in a nursing home, who have been there a long time, it shows on their lack of response and sad eyes. They don't try anymore.

**Old people teach us to guard and protect with every wise word and every wise action to commit to keeping relationships together.**

My father in law, who died this year at 96, had an agenda to do list whenever we would come and visit; however he would always manage to tell one more story, and delay us leaving with anything he could muster.

**Old people teach us to be forgiving, that is if they are forgiving.**

**Old people teach us to tell stories, so we can laugh at ourselves and enjoy the truth of our vulnerability**

**Old people teach us that HUGS are the most profound healing tool in all medicine. The effects of an honest hug are long felt and bring health and healing to our bones.**

**Old people teach us that us that hard work and honest hands bring fulfillment not only to us but others as well.**

**Old people teach us that with a smile, you can encourage without saying one word.**

**Old people teach us to not fear death when you know God.**

**Old people teach us that home cooked meals bring the meaning of home to your nose.**

**Old people teach us that the fragrance of Christ within them is a pleasing aroma to the saved and unsaved around them.**

**Old people are grandparents to love their children all over again with loving the grandchildren. And the wheel goes round and round.**

**Old people teach us that wrinkles are the character coming out on your face. So be careful how you think.**