

INSPIRE

Books are far better friends than most people

AUTHOR RALPH ELLISON

Want to LIVE LONGER?

Stop lying about your

AGE!

Says a top professor who, in a new groundbreaking book, reveals why changing your attitude to age is better for you than giving up smoking



Inspiring: Iris Apfel, now 100, promotes glassware brand Nude

Picture: SEBASTIAN KIM/NUDEGLASS.COM

WHEN Bonnie Garmus published her debut novel earlier this year she was a cool 64 years old.

With two failed books under her belt, she had been turned down by publishers a shocking 98 times. Yet that first novel, *Lessons In Chemistry*, an elegant revenge

comedy set in the 1950s and 60s, has become this year's big summer hit, shooting to the top of the bestseller list and snapped up for an all-star TV series. The U.S author is the perfect role model

for positive ageing. She shows that no one is 'over the hill' once they hit retirement, or that life necessarily gets less exciting the more years there are on the clock.

Another trailblazer is the American

businesswoman, interior designer and all-round style icon, Iris Apfel (pictured) who at age 100 is still a vivacious inspiration to the worlds of art and fashion.

Of course, that's not what society generally expects once we hit midlife and beyond. Instead, we are bombarded with negative attitudes to ageing, from the

TURN TO NEXT PAGE

by Louise Atkinson



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INSPIRE

How my silk pillows plumped up my bank account

by Liz Hoggard

WHEN Sonal Keay was diagnosed at 17 with a rare skin condition which makes her allergic to daylight, she had no idea that one day it would inspire a successful business.

Back then it made her weep with frustration. But today the former barrister, and mother-of-two, is the founder of This Is Silk, which sells silk solutions for sleep, skin and hair.

Her sustainably produced, 100 per cent mulberry silk, machine-washable pillowcases and accessories have a devoted following. In March, she launched an ethical beauty range containing silk peptides, which has proved a balm for women with sensitive skin conditions such as rosacea. Her Silk Cream Cleanser and Radiance Renewed Silk Overnight Oil (£39.99 each, thisissilk.com) have won 2022 Global Makeup Awards, and the oil was highly commended at the 2022 Natural Health Beauty Awards.

Pretty impressive for a woman who spent years feeling acutely embarrassed about her skin. 'I have chronic actinic dermatitis,' Sonal, 42, explains. 'This means I'm allergic to daylight, which is unusual because I am of Indian origin. 'I was born with appalling eczema, asthma and hay fever and spent a lot of time in and out of hospital as a kid growing up in Lincolnshire.'

SHE adds: 'After a holiday to France when I was 15, my skin started burning. It wasn't like normal sunburn, but a severe allergic reaction. I had so many tests and was diagnosed with this allergy.'

Over the next decade she learned to control the flare-ups. 'I covered up, kept away from water and reflective surfaces such as snow, and any photosensitising substances, including some medicines and flowers



Winning solution: Sonal Keay with her cleanser

such as the daisies.' She believes medication for teenage acne, following heavy topical steroid use for her eczema, also thinned her skin, with is why she is so passionate about using natural solutions wherever possible.

Later she trained as a criminal barrister, married and had her first child, Margaret, now eight. But when she was pregnant with her second daughter, Clara, now five, her skin became inflamed due to hormones. After the birth, her hair fell out and she had hot flushes.

She was in despair until she recalled that as a teenager the only thing that soothed her skin was the feel of silk on her face. 'I would sleep on silk scarves. It felt so cooling. So I began sleeping on silk pillowcases.'

'The relief was immediate, but she realised the cause ran deeper. I had been a barrister for 15 years and was getting burned out. I decided life was too short and that I needed to do something I loved.'

Sonal, who lives in the Cotswolds with her software

developer husband Steve, their two girls and dog Biscuit, began researching silk and was 'blown away' by the science behind it.

'It's highly regarded for its natural affinity with our skin, thanks to its anti-ageing and skin-healing properties. The proteins in silk help speed up cellular regeneration. It also protects new hair growth.'

So she put £3,000 on a credit card and launched This Is Silk in 2017. After taking a stall at a Country Living Fair, she knew she had a hit. 'We turned over £100,000 in the first 12 months.'

She went on to launch silk hair wraps to help blowdries last longer and calm frizz. Before they go into production, everything from sheets to scrunchies is home-tested.

Sonal loves the camaraderie of her new career. 'The Bar is a male-dominated place, so being around mainly women was new to me. I've been stunned by how supportive it has been, and I feel a bit sad that I missed out on it for so long.'

■ thisissilk.com

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

'grumpy old women' stereotype to the mocking OK Boomer meme that pigeonholes all older people as absurdly old-fashioned and resistant to change.

Now we're told that such negativity could even be affecting our health.

A growing body of research shows negative attitudes towards ageing increases the risk of dementia, heart disease and even menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes and insomnia.

A recent Seoul National University study, for example, found people who felt younger than their chronological age showed fewer signs of brain ageing than those who felt their true age or older.

Last year, German scientists from the University of Cologne showed that having a positive attitude towards growing older means you're more likely to 'age well'.

But it's Dr Becca Levy of Yale University in the U.S., who has pioneered and delved deepest into research that links attitudes towards getting older with the real-world effect they have on our bodies and minds.

'Positive age beliefs', she says, are better for you than low blood pressure or even giving up smoking.'

Remarkably, her work in the early 2000s showed that people who had an upbeat, optimistic view of getting older lived an average of seven and a half years longer than those who had negative feelings towards their later years.

Dr Levy's book, *Breaking The Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long And Well You Live*, shows us how to change these bad attitudes into age-prolonging

Never believe you are too old to try anything

good ones. By contemplating positive-ageing role models and messages for just ten minutes a day, she says, we can improve memory and create a 'buffer' that absorbs stress.

'In study after study I conducted, I found that older people with more positive perceptions of ageing perform better physically and cognitively than those with more negative perceptions of ageing,' she tells me. 'They are more likely to recover from severe disability, they remember better, they walk faster and they live longer.'

So if you find yourself worrying a little too much about the future or commenting on the alarming regularity of 'senior moments' (yours and those of people around you), it's time to make a change. Stop turning down fun opportunities because you think you're 'past it', and refuse to conform to negative ageing stereotypes that tell you, no, you're too old to try.

Above all, make your role model in life a 60-something late-bloomer like novelist Bonnie Garmus.

Here Dr Levy offers her evidence-based tips to help you strengthen your positive approach to ageing:

START AGE-JOURNALING TO PINPOINT PREJUDICE

BE ALERT for negative ageism all around you. This might take the form of images of old people as being frail or suffering or it could be age-limits on job applications.

All too often older people are absent from films, advertising, and TV shows, from national conversations on urgent public policy issues, they are ignored by research trials and so many other realms of contemporary life.

While the TV and film industries might have improved their inclusion of gay and female characters in leading roles, older characters continue to get short shrift.

When they do appear — say, as an evil witch in a Disney cartoon or as

angry, forgetful character — the negative imagery infers that old age is something to be feared and avoided.

When older characters are portrayed as villains or objects of pity or ridicule, is it any wonder some children in ageist cultures fear becoming old?

Our TV and movie culture warps our understanding of what old age and older people are really like.

My team found people who watch a lot of television are more likely to have negative views on age. And when members of marginalised groups don't see themselves represented on television, in books, ads or online, it can lead to lower self-worth.

So, start by boycotting the 'humorous' birthday cards that make fun of age and send out negative messages.

Next, try 'age journaling': for one week, write down every image of ageing, positive or negative that you see. Picking out the negatives helps you become more aware of ageist stereotyping around you, and better able to avoid falling into and perpetuating those common cultural traps.

In my studies, I found this kind of 'active noticing' helps develop a keen awareness of not just blatant ageism, but also the more subtle forms of exclusion and marginalisation.

YES, YOU CAN LEARN NEW TRICKS

STOP using ageist phrases such as 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks' and refuse to engage with the idea of being 'over the hill'.

If you stumble, accept that you 'tripped' or 'lost your balance' and are not the sort of person to 'have a fall'.

OLDER, BUT ALSO WISER

AIM to be positive about ageing at every opportunity. In Japan older people are treated like rock stars and there's a national holiday each year called 'Respect for the Aged Day' to celebrate their achievements.

My studies show that even by subliminally exposing people to words like 'wise' we can activate positive age stereotypes and trigger improved memory performance, balance, walking speed and even will to live.

PICK FOUR POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

HUNT down positive role models. These might be older relatives, neighbours, film stars, public figures now or throughout history. Positive role models don't just make us feel good; they actually help change our behaviour by inspiring and motivating us with examples of people who continue to grow and accomplish goals.

Make a list of four older people who exemplify qualities you admire (great sense of humour, great storytelling, super-stylish wardrobe, toned arms, impressive headstands).

You can pick a couple of role models from your own life and others from the wider world. Then, for each, pick out one or more qualities you admire and would like to strengthen in yourself.

NEVER BLAME 'SENIOR' MOMENTS

DON'T blame your age. If you lose your car keys, miss an appointment or forget a name, tell yourself you are just having a 'moment of forgetfulness' which could be blamed on having your focus elsewhere — this can happen at any age. It's not a 'senior moment' (in fact, studies show some aspects of memory improve in later life).

If you tear a muscle on the tennis court, don't decide you're too old for sport — you probably didn't warm up properly, or need new trainers.

If you do find yourself blaming your age for a sore back or missing a joke, notice the circumstances: Did you pick up something too heavy or is the background noise too loud?

MAKE SURE TO MIX WITH MILLENNIALS

TAKE part in 'intergenerational' activities which encourage you to mix

People who are upbeat about getting older add an average of 7½ years to their life



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Life's LITTLE luxuries

PADDLE BOARDS

Picture: GETTY/ISTOCK

SO WHAT SORT OF 'OLD' ARE YOU?

NOW take HARRY WALLOP'S wickedly revealing quiz...

1. What shoes are you currently wearing?

A. Right now? Havaianas flip flops. Tonight it's going to be kitten heels. I'm out dancing.

B. I've just bought some Marks & Spencer wedge espadrilles.

C. My pair of Hotter Sugar II — they are extra supportive and the touch-close strap is so much easier than laces.

2. How do you keep in touch with your grandchildren?

A. Mostly Snapchat. We send each other silly pictures. I find TikTok brilliant, too, for the latest memes.

B. Facebook, mostly. It's great to see their artwork and holiday pictures.

C. I call them on my landline. I keep their numbers on a sheet of laminated A4 by the phone.

3. Glastonbury tickets go on sale for next year. You react by:

A. Sitting by your laptop, tablet, PC and phone screen, manically refreshing. You just pray Kendrick Lamar is headlining again.

B. You quite fancy the idea of going to watch the Rolling Stones, who are rumoured to be performing. Gosh, they are good. But camping? We'll probably watch them on the telly.

C. Exercise? I really don't think my knees would cope. In any case, I don't own any plimsolls.



6. You have a landmark birthday coming up. How are you going to celebrate?

A. We're throwing a huge bash with a live DJ. I'm hoping my new cycling club friends will come and meet the kids.

B. A family tea party with champagne.

C. The idea terrifies me. I am hoping everyone will forget.

7. Who is your favourite Hollywood actor?

A. Ryan Gosling. Gosh, he is gorgeous. I can't wait to see him in *The Gray Man*.

B. It was great watching Tom Cruise in *Top Gun Maverick* after all these years.

C. No one can compare to Cary Grant. Every so-called star since is a pale imitation.

RESULTS

MOSTLY AS: Age for you is purely a number. But be careful on that bike — taking selfies while going downhill isn't a good idea.

MOSTLY BS: You know that the secret to a fulfilling second half of life is trying new things.

MOSTLY CS: There is a difference between taking it easier and giving up. You are at risk of talking yourself into being old before your time.

with younger people on an equal footing.

It is extremely beneficial to keep searching out ways to connect across the age ranges. It helps the different generations develop

positive views about each other. So think about how to increase your intergenerational contact, for example, in the form of a mixed-age yoga class, an online book club, or just get to know an older

colleague or neighbour, and come up with two activities you could take part in next month that would involve the participation of different age groups. Playing a musical instrument

LAST CHANCE TO ENTER



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