

Self-Defense and More

As America prepares for the Baby Boomers to enter their next phase of life, becoming the older adults in society, America finds itself underprepared to meet their physical and psychological needs. On June 3rd, 2011, the online magazine *SFGate* ran an article that provided an example of how unprepared we are to support the aging Baby Boomers. The author, Dr. Bill Thomas, explains how currently there are fewer than 6,000 medical doctors trained to help the elderly, but more than 30,000 are needed to provide appropriate care.

The US Census Bureau estimated in 2008 that there were approximately 45 million US Citizens who were between the ages of 65 and 100 years of age. Their current estimates show there will be an increase to approximately 98 million citizens in the same demographic over the next 40 years.

With the Baby Boomers beginning to enter the 65+ age range, it is reasonable to expect an increase in the number of people suffering from physical decline, as well as mental and emotional suffering. In support of this theory, the authors, Harris, Cook, Victor, et al. (2006) point out that cross sectional studies show a strong association between disabilities, social support, socioeconomic factors, general health, loss of control, and the prevalence of depression in older people. Furthermore, in a 2003 article, Demura and Sato discuss the relationship between depression and the quality of life for the elderly and how depression is influenced by factors such as physical functioning, psychological status, and socio-environmental factors (social network).

The Baby Boomers are a generation of “doers,” as is evidenced by the political, social, and scientific changes they brought about over the last 40 years (e.g. women’s liberation, ending segregation, invention of the personal computer and internet, etc.). Unfortunately, the once proud and confident Logan’s Run generation is beginning to face the challenges once believed to belong only to the elderly. As hard as they have fought against time, it has caught up with them, leaving the Boomers to struggle with chronic illness, disabilities, and loss of loved ones to death in greater and greater numbers each year. These struggles take their toll and incrementally cause a reduction on the quality of life once appreciated by the strong “go getting” Baby Boomers.

One Baby Boomer took a different stance and decided to help educate people on how to use the cane as a symbol of liberation, versus a symbol of loss or infirmity. More than 15 years ago, Mark Shuey, Sr., a martial arts expert and Grandmaster of the American Cane System, decided to create a self defense and exercise system built around the cane. His inspiration came when he was watching the news and heard about three elderly ladies who had been brutally attacked; two of them had canes but

didn't think to use them as a weapon for defending themselves. From that day forward, he decided to educate the public about the strengths inherent in the cane.

"For one thing, the cane is the only self-defense tool you can legally carry with you anywhere," explains Grandmaster Shuey. "When I travel, I am even allowed to bring it on the plane with me. No one even thinks twice about it."

In a 2009 edition of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, Thomas Woodward, MD, discussed the benefits participation in martial arts has for both the physical and psychological well-being of the practitioner.

Realizing that the cane was more than just a crutch, Grandmaster Shuey worked with physical therapists to create a series of exercises involving the cane. The exercises they produced range from isometric to isotonic (using exercise bands) and work the entire body. The American Cane System has exercises that address all physical levels, from needing major rehabilitation to body-builder-level fitness.

Grandmaster Shuey's American Cane Masters System does a great job of helping people to move beyond their current infirmities and start recapturing their quality of life. But the story doesn't end there. In 2009, while working on his doctorate in clinical psychology, Brian Salinas blew out his knee. Instead of slowing down his life, he researched his options and discovered the American Cane Masters System.

While learning the Cane Masters System, Dr. Salinas realized the system's philosophy would go well with the philosophy of a psychotherapy style known as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). For over 30 years, ACT has been helping clients deal with chronic pain, disabilities, depression, loneliness, and more. ACT uses a scientific approach to achieving mindfulness. This is accomplished by teaching the client how to stay in contact with the present moment, achieve cognitive defusion, acceptance, engage the observing self, knowing your values, and commit to action. For more information about the life skills, go to www.mbcssystem.com.

Dr. Salinas felt that combining the ACT "life skills" with the American Cane Masters System will help improve the quality of life for students faster than either would individually; however, this didn't address an often overlooked need of members of the older adult community. As people enter the "over 60" period in their life, the support network they were once accustomed to begins to diminish as they lose close friends and family members to death. Additionally, health issues and disabilities further reduce any sense of community connectedness.

From this understanding, the Mind-Body-Community System (MBCS) was created. MBCS addresses the student's physical needs with Grandmaster Shuey's American Cane Masters self-defense and exercise system. The psychological needs

are met through the use of ACT life skills training. And the emotional needs are met through connecting the student to a new community, one that is on the same journey.

References

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