

Living longer, but not necessarily healthier or happier: a birthday can be a daunting thought for anyone past the big 2-1. Whilst we're very lucky here in Australia to be privileged with our medical system, there is so much more to life than doctors' appointments- or is there after turning 65?

These days everyone is busy. Society tells us if we're not on the go ALL the time, we're probably doing something wrong. I'm slowly learning and implementing balance myself, finding that making time for having a cup of tea with my four grandparents (who at 23 I'm very lucky to still have around and have a great relationship with) is an important use of my time.

I would call myself a compassionate, understanding person- but also very much lacking in patience as a personality trait. This doesn't lend very well to sitting around having a cup of tea, but like I said- I'm working on it. I used to pop in wearing my gym gear, have a quick chat and run off again. These days, if morning tea leads to lunch and op-shopping or crafting, I am so okay with it. Which is something we all say we are too busy to do, BUT (and I am finally getting to the point here) remember they were once busy too. They were once the busy little bee you are today. Both my grandmothers were married and had at least one baby by my age. Nonno had just moved to Australia, knowing no English and was building a business. Grandad was working, going to night school and providing for his wife and child.

It is an intergenerational issue, society tells me I need to be busy, and it tells my grandparents to sit in the background and wait for me to make time for them. Societal demands and norms impact everyone, and it is the breaking down of these that allows to become the best version of ourselves.

Nan said to me recently, "I didn't ever believe that older people just became invisible until I suddenly was no longer seen. I'm no longer the beautiful one, I don't turn heads and so people no longer see me. But I'm still me. I still need love and attention and validation". Even my mother said to me recently (and she is not elderly), "if I'm with you, cashiers don't even speak to me. They always gravitate towards the younger ones, it's just how it is". This is something EVERYBODY experiences. We all get older, we cannot control this. Yet still, it continues to be an issue for our ageing population as we behave as though they are invisible and unimportant.

They are us. We are them. They've been here. They have stories, memories, reasons to laugh and cry, smile and grimace. They used to save all their money to travel, to be tormented over whether or not that boy liked them, to stay out all night and party til they could snuggle up on a beach and watch the sunrise.

They've been here. They've lived this. Yet still, society acts like they are redundant. We shove them in a corner, drug them up and tell them "it's different now, you wouldn't understand."

They do. They are people. My great-grandmother, who at the ripe old age of 100 uses an ipad to email her 8 children, 27 grand-children and 39 great-grandchildren. She is able.

My point, that I seem to be getting side-tracked with, is that we cast them aside and assume they have no business in today's business. We perhaps see them at Christmas and Easter (kind of like church-going behaviour) for a little minute and go back about our lives. My point is, they understand you are busy. But when you look at their lives, where the most exciting part of their day can be a doctors visit or a trip to the grocery store... There has to be more we can do for them.

I'd love to be able to inspire just one person to make a change in their habits. To make the effort that they have always made for you. Do unto others as you wish for them to do to you. You cannot

control the behaviour of another person, but you can control your actions. You can put a smile on someone else's face, make them feel warm and cherished. Assure to them that they matter.

Nan, you are still the protagonist in your life story, and I wish for you to feel no less.

Grandad, your stories are fun and interesting, because yes life is different now. But I enjoy learning.

Grandma, I love hearing your cooking tips. I love hearing about the new things you've read and how you're enjoying doing Zumba to "Tones and I".

Nonno, I'm glad you're starting to open up about the war. I'm glad you feel safe enough to tell us how things affected you and your family. Your little quips keep us entertained always.

Without them, there is no us. And in the future, we will be them. We know the horror stories of loneliness, of abuse and of abandonment. I certainly don't want that for myself, and imagine not many others do either.

-Emily Beraldo