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**Ideas for Intergenerational Living**

*a series of articles devoted to promoting cooperation  
and exchange between the generations.*

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**Older Adults Help Make Sense of Economic Turmoil**

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With thousands of job layoffs and recession dominating daily headlines, many young people are understandably fearful about their future. We are going through economic circumstances that younger generations have never experienced before. These are trying times for young people trying to figure out their careers or get started on their own. Grandparents and great grandparents have much experience and wisdom to offer.

Many older family members have lived through economic hardship and dealt with a lot of uncertainty, so they know how to survive. They have figured out how to be frugal when it is necessary and how to finance a lifestyle.

For example, those who lived through WWI will remember how war ration books and tokens were issued to each American family, dictating how much gasoline, tires, sugar, meat, silk, shoes, nylon and other items any one person could buy. People were proactive and creative in finding ways to survive and thrive. Folks grew “Victory Gardens” to help feed their own families and take pressure off of public food supply. The same idea can help resource-strapped families to produce their own food today.

The historic experience of living through financial hardship has relevance to surviving today. There is value to having a strong sense of thrift – for example, re-using things, stretching resources, and not living beyond one’s means. There is also value to being self reliant such as in growing one’s own food.

Young people can gain an intellectual understanding of what happens during economically tough times from history classes in school. However, this does not necessarily prepare them for the emotional side of dealing with the loss and uncertainty that comes with personal financial hardship. To help fortify a young person’s emotional bearings for encountering economically tough times, it is useful for them to hear real stories about how their elderly relatives not only survived, but thrived in ways that kept their families together and value systems intact.

Older adults’ lives provide instructive examples on everything from food to finance. Lifelong practices that have had positive or negative consequences can help to guide younger generations in the right direction.

We also need to keep in mind that many older adults are struggling themselves and may need support from younger family members. Nobody is immune to being negatively affected by the deteriorating economic environment that we now find ourselves in. Many older adults who have retired or are near retirement are losing significant portions of their retirement savings. We also know that many fall victim to scams designed to remove them from their savings and assets, and they need to increase their “financial literacy” skills.

These are needs that people of all generations share, particularly in these uncertain times. Perhaps the only way we can truly survive this current economic downturn is to come together in ways that utilize each generation’s knowledge, fortitude, and compassion for helping others in need. In the least, let us not lose sight of the fact that older adults have much to teach and contribute to younger generations, *especially* during trying times such as these.

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