Being older doesn't mean one's life is over

By Valerie Smith-Madden
AFRO Staff Writer

"A man is not old as long as he is seeking somethings"
Jean Rostand

Black Baltimore has many examples of older persons who are still making contributions to the community.

One only has to think of an Enolia McMillan, a Mary West Miller or a Parren J. Mitchell to see that being older doesn't mean that one's life has to come to an end.

The black community is littered with active, and involved older persons. They have made their "Golden Years" just that: golden.

But for many others, old age is a time of hardship and struggle. Infirmaties, coupled with fixed income woes, can make life difficult.

For the black elderly, many of their concerns mirror that of the poor. Adequate shelter is needed. How can they sustain themselves on a fixed income?

Statistically, among blacks over 65, one in four are poor. Nearly half of all black women over 65 are poor.

Many of the physicians who attended the recent "Clinical Aspects of Aging Symposium: Blacks and Aging," agreed that very little is known about the black elderly.

Matthew Tayback, coordinator at the Johns Hopkins Center on Aging said, "The natural history of aging is undergoing an immense change."

While tremendous strides in combating disease have enabled people to live longer than ever before, the black elderly still find themselves in a precarious position.

"This small population (the black elderly make up about 8 percent of the total elderly population)," said Tayback, "has denied to us considerable information that we need to know to improve their health circumstances."

As the baby boom generation moves into middle age, society's concept of what is old is changing.

But black people have been ahead of the game. For many of those in good health and of a sound mind, age is just a number.

Blacks are not as likely to show their age. The abundance of melanin in black skin helps to retard aging.

Statistically, black women over 65 have the lowest suicide rates. This is quite surprising given the number of black women over 65 who are classified as poor.

Many of these women are active, and have very strong support networks. Many of them find a great deal of satisfaction with their lives.

While struggling in itself brings no happiness, many elderly black women, who are active in church, are able to cope with stress and loneliness better than their younger counterparts.

Some seem to deal with stress effectively because, as one older woman put it, "I take all my cares to the Lord."

Black men, on the other hand, don't fare so well.

"Blackmen," said Dr. Harold P. Freeman, "have the most severe problem with cancer."

Freeman, who is an associate professor of clinical surgery at Columbia Hospital and director of surgery at Harlem Hospital Center in New York wonders "if the entire survival rate for cancer isn't influenced by economic status?"

Dr. Freeman added that American black men have the highest incidence of prostate cancer in the world.

Dr. Freeman cited differences in black and white lifestyles: black smoke more and their dietary habits are different.

Given the high incidence of cancer in the black elderly, Dr. Freeman posed an interesting question at the "Black and Aging Symposium."

"To what extent is this a racial problem vs. the way people are forced to live?"

The black elderly have many programs at their disposal to help improve the quality of their lives.

If it's a social atmosphere and interaction with peers that is desired, the Waxter Center is the perfect place.

The elderly there are encouraged to take part in a wide range of

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Is the garbage dump really the end of the road for the gentleman above?

UMAB pharmacy students holding educational programs

Under the theme, "Continuing To Strive In '85," the Student National Pharmaceutical Association of the University of Maryland Pharmacy School will host the 1985 Spring Region I meeting, March 15-16, in Pharmacy Hall on the UMAB campus. Eighteen colleges of pharmacy are represented in the SNPhA, an organization of black pharmacy students which was founded nationally in 1972 at the University of Tallahassee.

Following a reception on Friday evening in Westminster Hall, the Saturday schedule will begin with greetings from chapter president Linda Spenser and remarks by Dr. William J. Kinnard, Jr., dean. The keynote address will be given by Dr. Ralph Quarles.

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A Legacy of Character

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following poem, "A Legacy of Character," written by Tina Gray, 1008 Druid Hill Ave., was composed in honor of the naming of the downtown courthouse in honor of the late Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. The dedication is scheduled for Friday morning, March 8.

By Tina Gray

This is the legacy of Clarence Mitchell, Jr.
And very fittingly so—
A master at creating change—
Without upsetting the status-quo—
He was tall and strong like a mighty oak tree—
Never compromising his principles—
Forever lobbying to set the bound free—

Although he grew from a humble beginning—
He became ambassador to mayors, governors and residents—
Humble beginning, yes but his legacy is neverending—

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—Dr. Kerr

Continued from page 1

Washington to attend Howard University School of Pharmacy.

Dr. Kerr passed his State Board examination prior to graduation and worked for a number of years as part time pharmacist and musician.

Despite this taxing schedule, Dr. Kerr teamed with the late W. Llewellyn Wilson, former Douglass High School music teacher, and Kennard Williams, lyricist, in writing their own musical reviews. Dr. Kerr also conducted a dancing school with another violinist, the late Harry T. Pratt, one time Douglass High School Principal.

The late Lewis E. Toomey was at one time the only black man able to hire the Lyric Theatre. Dr. Kerr was affiliated with him in a group called the Troubadors and also played at Mr. Toomey's Annual Day Ball.

Kerr's Drug Store was a mini-"community center" where this pharmacist became known for his ice cream sodas and sundaes, and the ladies delighted in preening before the full length mirror in the rear of the well stocked store.

"Doc" took a personal interest in his customers, dispensing with each sale his own gentle brand of wit and wisdom and always a smile and words of encouragement.

This pharamacist formulated and sold 16 of his own drug products including the well known Kerr's-Kell-A-Kough a cold remedy, popularized by the catchy rhymes used in his ads.

He counseled those in trouble, wrote letters, was confidant and "banker" for many of his customers, and often dispensed his own brand of psychological first aid to the troubled and distressed.

Using an extensive picture collection of black achievers, Dr. Kerr would talk to the neighborhood children and encourage them to select a role model to emulate.

Along with the late Dr. John R. Coasey, physician, and Dr. Isaac H. Young, Dr. Kerr was one of the "Big Three" who looked after the health needs of the neighborhood.

He was elected to the Honor Roll of the AFRO-AMERICAN Newspaper in 1940. In 1930 Baltimore organized its own Baltimore City Colored Orchestra. Dr. Kerr was first violinist and concert master under the three conductors, Charles Harris, Llewellyn Wilson and Harrison Dodd.

When his daughter, Louise, was denied entrance to the training class of Enoch Pratt Free Library, he joined her as co-plaintiff in a Civil Rights Court case which eventually resulted in the dropping of the color bar aginst employment.

In 1976, the Maryland Pharmaceutical Society, honored Dr. Kerr as the oldest black pharmacist in the state.

On his 90th birthday Dr. Kerr was feted by his family at a party attended by over 100 persons. He received honors and citations from President Jimmy Carter, the Governor, the Mayor, the NAACP, Baltimore Urban League, City Council, Maryland Pharmaceutical Society and the U.S. Congress.

Dr. Kerr took great pride in a personal project in which he helped provide decent homes for scores of Baltimoreans in which they lived for many years, paying modest rents.

In his retirement years, Dr. Kerr continued his musicial activities. He fulfilled a life long ambition by taking classes at Peabody Institute, where his son was not allowed to attend. He studied violin and flute.

With the late Howard Carter and Miss Bertie Valentine, he formed a string trio which met and played weekly at his home until the death of the other members.

His other hobbies included keeping a scrapbook on current happenings in Black History and making tapes of his recollections of local history.

Dr. Kerr married a classmate, Miss Geneva Louise Lyles on Jan. 28, 1914, she died in 1977. They were the parents of four children, three of whom survive. They are two sons, Thomas H. Kerr, Jr., retired associate professor of music at Howard University; Judson H. Kerr, Sr., retired realtor and tax consultant, and a daughter, Mrs. Louise Kerr Hines, retired state employee. There are 7 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren and a great-great-grandchild.

When he had a cataract operation in 1969 it was the first time in his life he had been confined to bed.

He entered Kenson Nursing Home April 24, 1984. Each time we visited him he would say, "I am happy, contented and blessed because I don't have an ache or a pain. I am grateful for everything that is done for me."

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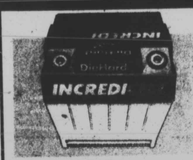
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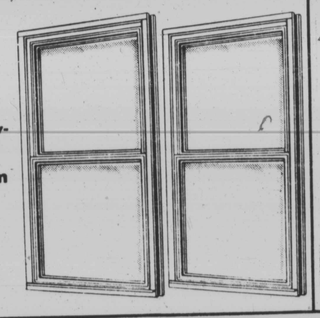

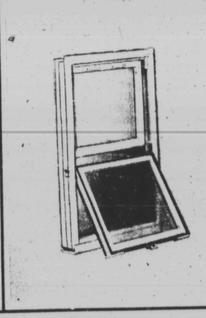
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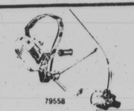
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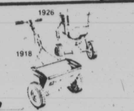
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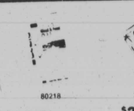
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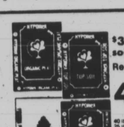
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