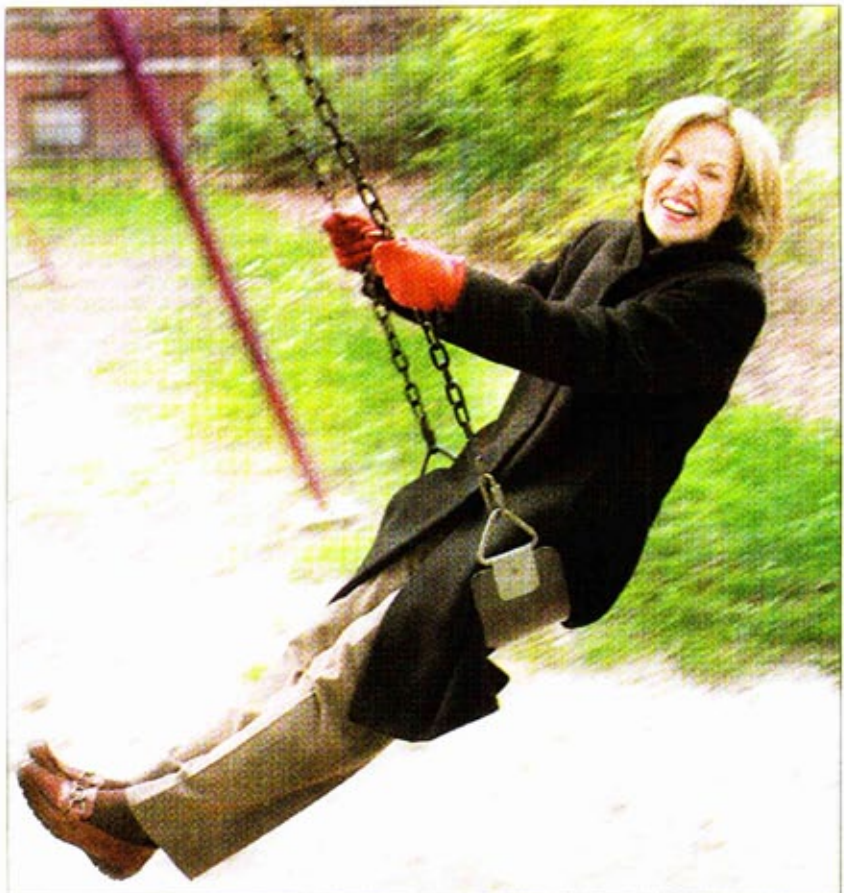


ABOUT RETIREMENT

SHE'S 58 GOING ON 38

Elaine Dembe
is a cheerleader
for ageing
younger,
healthier and
happier.
FW5



This cheerleader for life has the keys to longevity

The secrets of 'inspirement'



WILLIAM HANLEY
About Retirement

Elaine Dembe gets right to the point. As we sit down for lunch at a midtown Toronto restaurant, the star chiropractor who has also made a name for herself as an author and motivational speaker on ageing and stress management declares: "I hate the word 'retirement,' because to me, it sounds like a diminishment of life. I'd like to suggest a new word, for example, 'inspirement'."

I'm not about to change the name of this column to "About Inspirement." But Dembe's message is received loud and clear: The second half of life, she says, can be as passionate, purposeful and meaningful as the first half. "I call it a half because we're really supposed to live to 120."

Make no mistake. Dembe, at 58 going on 38, looks as though she might make it to the six-score mark. A one-time elite marathon racer, she remains super-fit by running, walking briskly, lifting weights and doing lots of men's full push-ups. She flexes her biceps and I reckon she could easily take me in an arm wrestle.

"I know the key secrets to living healthily, happily and joyfully while you're going through the normal ageing process," she says.

These secrets and more are outlined in her two books, *Passionate Longevity: The 10 Secrets To Growing Younger* and *Use The Good Dishes: Finding Joy In Everyday Life*. And, she announces, she has just this very morning decided to write another book, *Re-energize Your Work, Your Life*, which she'll begin to work on over Christmas.

"I have the gift of great energy. I've always had it," she says, adding that some people have called her "a cheerleader for life."

Dembe grew up in Hamilton, one of two children, left university to start and run a fashion business for three years, then returned to school for four years to study to be a chiropractor. Though she wasn't an athlete in school, she later became a marathoner, running 17 races and recording the 11th-fastest time for a Canadian woman in the early 1980s. She was married for six years, but divorced in 1988. She has no children, but notes on her great-nieces and great-nephews.

Meantime, she has focused much of her energy on those of us in, or preparing for, what she calls the second half of life, and what I like to call the Third Act. "The secret of happiness, I read once, is something to do, something to love and something to look forward to. We need a reason for getting out of bed in the morning."

Health, she says, is the key to happiness at any age.

"It's about having an efficient, physical body that allows you to do things. It's about having strong muscles because you lose half-a-pound of muscle every year after age 40 if you don't do anything. It's about needing to lift weights, do push-ups, climb stairs, walk fast. You need to be able to stand on one leg and not be looking for a wall to hang on to."

I could throw in wealth, too. But wealth without health can give no great satisfaction.

As Boomers like Dembe head toward their second half, the focus on holding back time, on age and ageing itself, is intense. It is an endless numbers game of measuring the distance between life and death, and many people have one eye on the clock and the other on the mirror.

"People allow a number — their age — to dictate their choices in life," she says. "How many of us say: 'I'm too old to do this or how can I do this at my age?' Many people have a perception of what they should or should not be doing based on how old they are. Instead, I suggest they decide on what passion/hobby activity/work they love and just do it."

If you were making up a list of what you wanted to take along on the journey into retirement — or inspirement — Dembe suggests you include the following: As good as health as possible; good friends who are life-enhancing people; some joy and passion every day; ways to keep your stress levels in balance; a healthy diet consisting of lots of fruit and vegetables; and some courage so you can try new adventures.

To her great credit, she is walking the talk. She lives in her (mortgage-free) "dream home" in a great midtown neighbourhood and has a strong relationship with her boyfriend of four years. She works about 30 hours a week in her practice, with her many public-speaking engagements giving her travel opportunities and the chance to meet a wide spectrum of people. And she enjoys adventure hiking — she walked the Inca trail to Machu Picchu in Peru last Christmas and is considering climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro next year. (You can learn more about her and what she does at elainedembe.com.)

All these displays of energy and talk of energy have just about tired me out. After a good lunch and chat, I'm feeling more like a roll model than a role model. But when the bill arrives, Elaine Dembe and I find ourselves on the same humble ageing plane. At first, neither of us can make out the exact tab: Is that an eight or a three? Even when she dons her glasses, she's at a loss. I finally decipher the correct amount using her glasses. Thank goodness, I think. Dembe, dynamo that she is, is human after all.