SYMPOSIUM SPEECH

FOR

SHAWN PERRY

Hello everyone!! It’s such a privilege to be here and to have the opportunity to meet and speak with so many of you about a topic much more near and dear to everyone’s hearts than some might let on. It is such a rare and special occasion when one gets the chance to speak in front of such an incredibly distinguished gathering. I see so many notable, important, vital contributors to our community (**if you want to make a little joke you can say**)… Oh, and it’s really great to see you too, Mayor. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_!!! (**Name some of the influencers but say this in a tone that leaves no doubt that the distinguished guests present are the senior citizens from the community and wait for the laugh**). Of course we’re all thrilled to be in the presence of such respected dignitaries like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but honestly speaking, **everyone** here is a vital, important and indispensible member of this exciting, diverse, and eclectic group. It’s our privilege to do whatever we can to enrich the Senior Zone!

Betty Friedan once said, “Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength.” It’s evident that anyone alive today, if they are lucky, will have the privilege of experiencing what it’s like to age, to feel like somewhere deep inside of one’s soul youthful curiosity still flourishes but as we look out on the world we see the scene change around us at seemingly dizzying speed and the days tend to slip by faster and faster. We’ve lived through the blossoming spring of our youths and we’ve experienced long, hot summers as young adults. As we get older, the trick to life is to find the way to capture and savor the “Indian Summers” of our lives. We all hear that “Fifty is the new Forty” and “Eighty might become the new sixty-five.” With the encouragement and support of organizations like (**name some of the senor advocacy groups present**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and of course with the outreach and contribution to the community of the Senior Zone, our goal is “Ninety is the new Seventy five or…. **Who’s even counting!?!**”

I am willing to wager that just about **EVERYONE** in this room has someone-whether it’s a former teacher, a grandparent, neighbor, family friend or community figure, who, thanks to their experience and wisdom, and all that they have so generously shared with **YOU**, serves as an icon-a muse-a voice of reason and a font of memories and precious information for each one of us. I cannot even imagine how colorless my life would be without all that I learned from my elders while growing up and as a young adult. Think about who that person is for you and then fill in the blanks as we paraphrase one of the immortal lines from “Wuthering Heights”…. “I don’t love\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ … name **YOUR** senior muse…. I **AM**…\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

Ladies, gentlemen and distinguished guests, this is now the fourth (?) year of this annual symposium on aging. Four years ago each one of you was younger, possibly more energetic, and probably thought all of the secrets of life are and were at your feet. Here we are four years later. We are all on that road together. (**Name a pop culture icon the audience might think is an amusing example**). Had he lived, Elvis would be **EIGHTY**!! Marilyn Monroe would be turning **EIGHTY-NINE**!! Madonna is **ONE** **OF US** at **FIFTY-SIX**!! I think the point I’m trying to make is quite clear… we are **ALL** worthwhile human beings deserving of respect, dignity, consideration and encouragement. Age is just a number…. but it’s worthy of celebration, respect, and support.

The Senior Zone was founded in 2011 with the intention of being a “virtual haven” devoted to senior citizens, their caregivers and families who support and encourage them, and all of who face challenges and opportunities in the day to day roller coaster ride we know as life. Our mission is to provide a forum of connection and **possibilities**-tools, resources, programs and services for this rapidly increasing sector of our population right here in the Washington DC metro area. (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) Our mission is to spread our word and our message of support virally…. I know… “Back in the day” “**viral**” didn’t sound like such a good idea… but today being able to reach out and get our message to as many people as possible is the way of the world. I remember hearing an expression when I was growing up. “Bad news travels faster than good.” Well today **ALL** news travels fast, but in many instances, especially when it comes to supporting and encouraging those among us that may be elderly, disabled, vulnerable or marginalized, viral is a **GOOD THING**!! Information, guidance, and concrete planning are essential tools in effectively navigating the complications of life and aging.

Statistics tell us that as of 2014, the 78 million American baby boomers began turning 65 at the rate of **one every 10 seconds**. Ladies and gentlemen, that’s not just a trend, it’s a **JUGGERNAUT**! If a movement of **THAT** magnitude doesn’t inspire a sincere call to action on the part of each and every one of you, then what will?

The Senior Zone weekly broadcast addresses issues and concerns facing the modern senior. We work to impact, influence and improve the quality of life of this not so silent but definitely **MAJOR** segment of our population. We truly **care** about and for our community members and it is our mandate to discover the topics and discuss the critical issues that seniors face today. Our show intends to Educate, Enlighten, Empower, Entertain, Equip and Engage each senior that needs us or even just thinks there might be an issue. With tips and directions to programs and services, tools and resources, events, advice and cultural tidbits, the Senior Zone serves as an invaluable and versatile resource for the anyone that may need some encouragement or guidance. Our broadcasts offer us the once-a-week opportunity to visit seniors in their homes as we leverage a familiar medium to convey our message. For many **SENIOR** seniors, having a radio nearby transmitting the promise of sharing information and a slice of life- right in someone’s own living room is a comfort that recalls a simpler and less hectic era. A woman named Emily Green Balch said, “Technology gives us the facilities that lessen the barriers of time and distance…” and that’s what being on the radio and conveying our unique message does for us. With such valuable partners as the District of Columbia Office on Aging, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, the National Council on Aging, and so many more worthwhile and trusted voices for senior advocacy, the Senior Zone is poised to make a tremendous impact on an inevitably maturing segment of the populace.

Each one of you is here today because you **CARE**. You care about your community, your family, your friends and coworkers and yourselves. Consider this symposium as a call to action. Although some will say there’s plenty of time to join a movement that is apparently inevitable, I invite you to take action **NOW**.

Many of us were surprised yet deeply saddened to learn of Glen Campbell’s battle with Alzheimer’s disease. Just as he stood at the brink of his final journey, he was the subject of a documentary that captured the last light and flicker of his talent and depth as a lyricist and musician. In his song, “I’m Not Gonna Miss You,” we are invited to share some of his final and most intimate thoughts on what it’s like to age and deteriorate. He Sings, “ I’m still here, but yet I’m gone… I don’t play guitar or sing my songs.” His final battle is a poignant gift and an alert to all of us. There is something each one of us can do to support those treasures in our lives that are entering their senior years to greater or lesser degrees of success. Encourage them. Engage them. Be patient. Provide concrete, tangible, moral, intellectual, cultural and practical support. Empathize. Treat our senior community as **you** would want to be treated because before you know it, it will be **your** turn. Every brick you lay now on the path to understanding, and every effort made in navigating the world of the senior citizen is a step towards tolerance, inclusion and ultimately satisfaction and joy.

Thank you all!