

In the 1970s I began to think about the importance of the continuing effectiveness and contributions of older persons. I wrote about it in some detail in my book *Why Survive? Being Old in America* (1975). It was not until I chaired the Salzburg Seminar in Austria in 1982 that I began to talk directly about “productive aging”. I had been asked to build a seminar around dependency in old age. I argued that it would be a step forward to consider a more positive side of aging. I had remarkable colleagues at Salzburg including the great Swedish geriatrician Alvar Svanborg, the pioneer in the psychology of aging James Birren, Betty Friedan who represented the lives of women and wrote the famous book *The Feminine Mystique* and Herbert Gleason, secretary of the Salzburg Seminar. I encouraged them and the Salzburg fellows to think positively about aging.*

I did not interpret the concept productive aging to be formal work. I believe that even the

bedridden person can be productive, helpful to their caregivers. I consider taking care of oneself to be productive. The principal concept of productive aging is to remain constructive in relationship to the larger society and immediate environment as long as possible.

Of course, society in turn has to be respectful of age and provide opportunities for older persons to remain in constructive relationship with their environment for as long as possible.

I think the downside to productive aging is if it is only seen as work. This was not my intention.

As I look into the future of the concept I wonder if productive engagement might be a more effective term, not just suggesting work but alternative activities, self-care and so forth. My hope is older people will remain constructively involved and engaged in society to advance quality of life and length of life.

* Butler, R.N. and Gleason, H.P. *Productive Aging, Enhancing Vitality in Later Life*. Springer Publishing Company, New York, 1985.



His friends in the world...

Baroness Sally Greengross

Co-President of ILC Global Alliance
Chief Executive, ILC-UK

I first met Dr. Robert Butler over thirty years ago and was impressed with his positive attitude towards ageing and older people, a message he clearly drove home to millions of people across the world thereafter, challenging the negative stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes that, unfortunately, still prevail in many countries. His Pulitzer Prize book on poor care in Care Homes in the USA was itself a powerful force for change as were many other academic papers and popular books he wrote. However, without his constant advocacy, calling for radical changes to legislation and practice and his many books and scientific studies demonstrating the positive economic force for change older people represent, the situation of the elderly population would be far worse in all our countries. I got to know Dr Butler as a friend and a loving family man, and we

made many reciprocal visits to each others' homes in New York and London. I was always impressed that he listened to everyone he met and took their view seriously. His was approachable and kind whether speaking to the United Nations, to Heads of State or to ordinary people, when his genuine love and respect for older people was obvious.

Underneath the prestigious profile and the enormously high regard in which he was rightly held, was a man of modesty and simplicity, someone for whom long walks in the countryside, the exploration of new parts of the world and fun trips with his grandsons were delights which I have been privileged to enjoy with him. I will miss him always, but his inspiration will continue, guiding us in our future work, to improve the quality of life of older people everywhere.



(Left to right): Mr. Morioka, Dr. Forette, Baroness Greengross and Dr. Butler

Françoise Forette

CEO, ILC-France

I was so devastated to learn that Bob Butler passed away last July 4th. Given his energy, his drive, stamina, engagement and health, I thought he would live and work until, at least, a hundred years!

I met him some thirty years ago. I was a young doctor and researcher presenting our longitudinal study on hypertension in the Elderly at the IAGG Congress in Hambourg. He was chairman of the session and I have been right away impressed by his vision, his enthusiasm and his kindness with his younger colleagues. He invited me, some weeks later, to participate in a WHO meeting on Aging in Göteborg hosted by his friend Alvar Svanborg. Then, a long collaboration and friendship with these two outstanding pioneers in Geriatrics and Gerontology started and lasted for many marvellous years.

As pointed by Christine Cassel, president of the American Board of Internal Medicine, Dr Butler "created an entire field of medicine". He was the founding director of the National Institute on Aging at the NIH and helped all nations and particularly France to promote Geriatrics in the curriculum of the Medicine Students and to develop Research on Aging. The Department of Geriatrics and Adult Development that he founded at the Mount Sinai Medical

School was a model for all of us. I had the honor to be "Visiting Professor" in 1990 in this department and I gleaned there many ideas for developing our own Department of Geriatrics in the Hopital Broca in Paris.

The Gerontopole of Toulouse that the French Ministry of Health accepted to create two years ago is totally in accordance with Bob's concept of a Geriatric Department.

Influencing and inspiring MDs and health professionals was not enough for him. Then he founded the first International Longevity Center in 1990 to convince political, academic, industry decision makers that the striking increase in Longevity was an opportunity and not a threat for our nations. He fought all forms of ageism and discrimination. In 1996, on Bob's request, I founded in France the third International Longevity Center (ILC-France), the second being ILC-Japan founded immediately after ILC-US. Now there are 12 ILCs in the North and the South of the Planet inspired by Bob.

I do not think that Robert Butler can be replaced but he opened our eyes, prepared the way and left in us the will and passion to continue his work. We mourn a dear and beloved friend, but he gave us before passing his energy to change the world.