

Never too old and never too late

**Based on the book This Chair Rocks – a
manifesto against ageism - by Ashton
Applewhite**

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Cast:

Abbie Merritt: College undergraduate, social sciences

Dr. Ruth Wilson – Professor emeritus, social sciences

Phillip Jiminey – Skilled nursing facility resident

Graham Gollie – Skilled nursing facility resident

**Setting: quiet street, university campus, well after dark.
Abbie, driving, pulls her car over to where Dr. Wilson is
walking.**

Abbie

Hey! Dr. Wilson! How 'bout I give you a lift?

Dr. Wilson

Who's there? Abbie? Oh, hi! Sure, thanks, if you're goin' my way. You 'member where I live?

Abbie

Of course, I do. From study classes last year. Hop in!

Dr. Wilson

Thanks, though my hoppin' days are limited. It is getting dark a little earlier these days. Reminds me of life. What keeps you out this late on fall break?

Abbie

Eight-thirty's not that late. I just got off work. Someone else is closing tonight. I've gotta study for midterms. I could ask you the same question.

Dr. Wilson

I stayed late to do the discussion on Ageism. I was part of the panel. I hadn't planned ahead of time for my car to be in the shop, but it's not that far to walk home.

Abbie

I guess I missed that course. What's Ageism, again? It sounds discriminatory just by calling it an 'ism'.

Dr. Wilson

It's not a course yet. I think it will be. And, yes, it's a form of prejudice. Like sexism. Or racism. Or ableism, or homophobia. Just more ingrained, and more subtle.

Abbie

So, if a prejudice is thinking that you know what someone is like just because you know something about 'em... ageism has to do with their age.

Dr. Wilson

Right, in this case. As a young person, you have some real-life experiences with this, I'm sure.

Abbie

Oh, I get it! You mean like no one thinks generation Z would be working until 8:30 on a weekend night, for instance?

Dr. Wilson

Ha! Yes! Or on any night, for that matter!

Abbie

Right! They somehow 'know' we don't have that kind of ambition – just because of our age.

Dr. Wilson

Exactly! But all the other 'isms' add up, too, Abbie.

Abbie

I don't understand.

Dr. Wilson

So? What if you're young? And you're also black? Or Latinx? Or gay? And in a wheelchair? The biases keep on building – consciously or not - as the hits keep on coming.

Abbie

Oh, my God! Now I see what you mean. Some of my

friends probably feel all of those things. All at once! So, you're trying to get Ageism, like, recognized? Or repealed? As just one more kind of prejudice? And, for older people, too?

Dr. Wilson

Absolutely, but it's a bit of a hard sell. Ageism is still the one 'acceptable' prejudice. It's okay to be prejudiced against someone if it's only because of their age.

Abbie

Of course. I live it. People believe they know your thoughts if you're young. They've been there.

Dr. Wilson

Or, if you're old. They're headed there. Every single day, every one of us gets one day older, if I do my math right. But being against getting old is built into our culture. I was part of it, too, until I started examining it.

Abbie

What do you mean?

Dr. Wilson

Abbie, I'd drunk the Kool-Aid, too, like everybody else. I believed – and dreaded – all of the bad things I'd heard and been taught about older people. But I was ignoring the overwhelming evidence of my daily life. I needed to learn to trust myself more.

Abbie

Hunh. Yeah, you know when you think about it, there is bias about ages that shows up in lots of places.

Dr. Wilson

Look at advertising, Abbie. 'Stealth' marketing - directed *against* aging. Products that keep you 'forever young', for instance.

Abbie

You're right. Wrinkles should be illegal! I saw a billboard yesterday that said 'at age eighty, who doesn't need a facelift?' That's just wrong on so many levels.

Dr. Wilson

Yes! Yes! Old? *Can't* be good. Old? *Must* be sad. It sucks to be old, in every way possible, right? Old sucks the life from you, right?

Abbie

It is a love-hate thing.

Dr. Wilson

So, we're trying to back that out. To get people to rethink the ideas about old people they unconsciously incorporated as they grew up. That's what the panel was about tonight.

Abbie

I've not really given a lot of thought to how ageism fits older people. You're supposed to be respected - because you've made it! No one thinks *you're* lazy?

Dr. Wilson

Oh, Abbie, just you wait. When you get older, it's easy to be thought of as inconsequential. Invisible.

Abbie

God, I'm both of those right now. You feel like that, too? And I have more of this to look forward to?

Dr. Wilson

It's true. Ageism does cut both ways: it applies to the young and to the old. Now that I'm older, I'm one mispoken phrase away from being thought of as incompetent. Or worse? Confused! As if I didn't get confused when I was forty! My gosh.

Abbie

And I'm thought to be incompetent because I'm so uninformed. But the weird thing is, everybody's trying to get older! Or younger, for that matter! What's up? Know what? I bet they're all just jealous of us!

Dr. Wilson

Bingo! So, everyone wants to get older, but, what, Abbie ...?

Abbie

But... no one wants to be old?

Dr. Wilson

To the head of the class! And notice that no one ever refers to themselves as 'elderly', either, no matter how old they get? "Hi, I'm Shirley, I'm 103, and I'm elderly" ... sounds like the beginning of some kind of 12-step meeting. Like we're confessing something, when we should be proud instead.

Abbie

You're right! So?... What *do* you call older people, Dr. Wilson?

Dr. Wilson

'Older people' works for me. I'm okay with that.

Abbie

What about: 'elders'? Or: 'seniors'?

Dr. Wilson

You know, I don't like it. It makes us sound as if we're *all* somehow wise. Many older people are no wiser now than when they were young. I, personally, like the term 'olders'.

Abbie

I like that! And we 'Z'ers and 'Alpha's' can be 'youngers'.

Dr. Wilson

Yes! Not youngsters, mind you. Youngers...

Abbie

So, doesn't it make you a little nervous to be out walking alone this late at night?

Dr. Wilson

Am I too fearsome? Too intimidating? Don't worry. It's okay. I won't hurt anybody. The 'hood's' safe.

Abbie

I know that Dr. Wilson! I was worried about *your* safety, not theirs.

Dr. Wilson

What? You think olders can't be lethal? Be warned! I'm feeling pretty safe. I just took a course on how to use a

cane for self-defense. Now, I'm looking lame, but I am locked, and loaded.

Abbie

Great! Good for you! But, uh... just where is this cane?

Dr. Wilson

Hmmpf? A small crimp in the cosmic plan... I guess I left it in my car, Abbie. I'm usually not forgetful. I don't need a cane, so I'm not used to carrying it. Crap! Oops!

Abbie

Ha! Dr. Wilson, I don't go out alone after dark. If I do go out, it's always with a friend - or my dog.

Dr. Wilson

I guess I think no one would bother someone my age.

Abbie

That sounds almost ageist to me, I gotta say.

Dr. Wilson

Touché. I confess, I'm still a work in progress.

Abbie

Anybody out after dark is an easy target. You don't look frail at all – in fact, you look great for your age!

Dr. Wilson

Well, Abbie so do you! Do you see how insidiously ageism creeps in? Through every crack in our armor?

Abbie

Ha, ha! You're exactly right. Thanks! You just look good, right? What age you look good at doesn't really matter.

Dr. Wilson

In a perfect world. It's such a nice thing to say. But I'd hope how I look doesn't depend on allowing for my age. See?

Abbie

I do see. I do see, now. You have to have your eyes opened to actually 'see' prejudice. So then, Dr. Wilson, if you don't mind my asking, how old *are* you?

Dr. Wilson

Of course, I don't mind. I'm proud to be 72. And I'm learning that my 70's have been even more fun than my 60's.

Abbie

How does that even happen?

Dr. Wilson

Maybe because I'm getting into what's important and what's not. Time's shorter, so I try to savor it more. And I do feel so much freer.

Abbie

Give me an example.

Dr. Wilson

Like, well... we all seem to fear we could end up wasting away in a nursing home. Parked in the hall in a wheelchair, under a pastel floral print. Let me ask you this: how many people in America over 65 actually live in nursing homes, Abbie?

Abbie

Gosh, I dunno... Maybe... 30%?

Dr. Wilson

You're guess is closer than many. About 2.5%. For people over 85 years old, it gets up to 9 %. Sure, we get chronic illnesses, but we generally learn to cope as we 'age in place'.

Abbie

I worry the most about Alzheimer's. That seems inevitable. An unavoidable epidemic, with no way to avoid it?

Dr. Wilson

Gosh, Abbie, the real epidemic? is *worrying* about Alzheimer's disease. Ninety percent of olders seem to shuffle along just fine, finding their slippers every day, and moving right along. Oh! Turn here, please! This is my place.

Abbie

Okay... (She does.) What about mental health issues? That's huge. Isn't old age really sad? And depressing? (Puts her car in park and turns off the engine).

Dr. Wilson

No doubt, on an individual basis, it certainly can be. Have you ever heard about the 'U curve of happiness'?

Abbie

My Grandpa used to joke about 'the bluebird of happiness'. Probably a different thing. Let me see. (Goes to phone.)

Dr. Wilson

I remember. So, would you be surprised to know that people are happiest at the beginning - and at the end - of their lives? When you Google 'the U curve of happiness', the graph looks like a big, goofy smile. See?

Abbie

How funny!

Dr. Wilson

True, age might strip me of the things I previously cherished? As I unexplainably? Become more content! But the prejudices against aging and the old have been drummed into us from our childhood. Who knows about this embedded bias if you can't even see it? If it's the water we swim in? The air we breathe?

Abbie

So, you've been prejudiced, too? Against being an older person?

Dr. Wilson

I'm learning that the hardest prejudice about aging is prejudice against myself!

Abbie

What? I don't get that - at all.

Dr. Wilson

I'm always comparing myself - and my future self - to my younger self. America is grotesquely youth-centric. It's taken me years to totally appreciate that I might have been, too.

Abbie

Even as a younger person, I can see why you'd think that. But this being younger is not all it's cracked up to be.

Dr. Wilson

And we olders are the worst – because we believe, deep between our own ears – what we've been socialized to believe – and what we've lived a lifetime believing. But just look around you at older people, Abbie. Don't you see how different they each are from each other?

Abbie

Hey, some olders are like that handsome, tanned, dude with the silver hair, still out there surfing the pipelines...

Dr. Wilson

We might wonder if he's not in deep denial... and these same people? They cringe at a friend saying how long they've known them? Or they lie about their age on on-line dating services?

Abbie

Ha!

Dr. Wilson

Or they can't remember what date-of-birth they gave to their bank on their last visit? And God help you if you offer them your seat on the bus! That's when *you'll* need your cane - for self-defense!

Abbie

Ha! I get it! Or then, there's the opposite, the tiny little

woman wasting away in the nursing home ward...

Dr. Wilson

I call that the big Pharma approach. But neither one of these pictures is really typical of the group as a whole. Older people are rendered as being either so accomplished and worldly? Or worthless, incompetent, boring - even possibly repulsive.

Abbie

Two extremes – but one spectrum.

Dr. Wilson

Oddly enough, despite those images, very few people choose to opt out, do they?

Abbie

I've noticed that, for a fact.

Dr. Wilson

The truth is, if you've seen one 72-year-old, you've seen one 72-year-old. And I can guarantee you that my version of moving towards old age will be different from yours.

Abbie

That's so cool. So, I have many, many questions! What about a job, and relationships? These seem to have gotten bad press with getting older, but what do they have to do with age?

Dr. Wilson

Or a haircut, or hair coloring? Or clothes? Those really have very little to do with how old you are, do they?

Abbie

I love it! Wait 'til I talk with my Mom!

Dr. Wilson

And, understand this, Abbie: ageism can intentionally be, very precisely, about one thing: power. It is about making 'olders'? Into 'others'. Don't get me started!

Abbie

Too late! I want to hear this part... teach me.

Dr. Wilson

When politicians, or marketers - or doctors?

Abbie

Or employment agencies?

Dr Wilson

Yes! Oppress, or exploit, silence, or ignore people who are younger - or older -because they want others to judge us by our birthdate? Or our appearance? That is ageism. Ageism - used as power. Like a wedge.

Abbie

A powerful wedge. That is stark, naked, and hateful - and that same idea of 'other' is the real basis for all prejudices! Why? Why would they do that?

Dr. Wilson

To make a sale, Abbie. To save a buck. To limit medical costs. To remove you from the job market. To *keep themselves safe*. To demonstrate how much '*They*' *are not like*: you.

Abbie

So, how you look when you're older isn't really the issue.

Dr. Wilson

It's not about how we actually look. Or whether we've had that face lift that you saw advertised? It's about what they want to *imply* about our appearance.

Abbie

Wow! How interesting.

Dr. Wilson.

And, the thing is, our own attitudes towards our own aging actually have a real effect on how we function. Even at the cellular level. If we think less of ourselves, for any reason, we harm ourselves.

Abbie

You know, I believe that. I feel that.

Dr. Wilson

Those negative beliefs stress us. They lower our expectations and make us *less* - not more - healthy. Makes us *more* likely to have cognitive loss, not less likely... I warned you, once I get started...

Abbie

No! No, thank you for my private lesson, here, in this empty parking lot, on a Saturday night, for absolutely zero credit! Ha! But this is so much! So much real-world stuff - to think about.

Dr. Martin

Hey, Abbie! It's getting late. I do run on. I don't want to

keep you. You said that you have to study.

Abbie

Oh-mi-gosh, you're right. And I'm taking up *your* time. But it is fall break, and I feel like I'm learning a lot.

Dr. Wilson

And there's nothing I like to do better than teach. But - hey! If you're really that interested, I've got an idea! I'm 'going' to my 'occasional' Zoom call with some creative folks at a local care home on Thursday.

Abbie

God, my prejudice is really showing. 'Creative folks at a local care home' would have sounded like such an oxymoron earlier. 'Party like it's 1899'?

Dr. Wilson

Exactly!! Except we'll party via Zoom. You wanna see what they come up with? It's a time for them to present their words or songs or ideas for critique. Sometimes, it's just goofy fun. We start at 7:30.

Abbie

And they're still being creative about stuff?

Dr. Wilson

At their age? You have no idea. Don't let the gray hair fool you. Last week, a guy named Graham sang a parody for the mayor: The Old Gray Mayor She Ain't What She Used to Be! Mayor Burgess loved it – partly because she's only 47! And I think it's helping shape her agenda regarding ageing. It changed her mind.

Abbie

How funny! I don't work Thursday night. Sure! What

time? 7:30?

Dr. Wilson

You sure you'll still be up?

Abbie

Very funny! *That* was pretty awful. Yes, I'll set the alarm... You still have my e-mail address from last semester?

Dr. Wilson

I do. I'll send you an invitation. I'd better write that down. (She does.) Ha! Too many schedules. Invite your friends if you want. Whatever these olders choose to perform will be the luck of the draw, but we can see what bright flashy object has caught their attention.

Abbie

The 'mature' radical fringe? Gero-terrorists - in their natural habitat?

Dr. Wilson

Ha! A 'senior scavenger hunt'! Yes! We'll see if they're agreeing to age gracefully – or not? We have some anti-ageism activists in the crowd, for sure, and they can at times be vindictive. They've figured out that the world might possibly not always be fair as you age. Or even flat! So, they do take some pleasure in hitting back.

Abbie

How could I refuse? Send me the invite, please.

Dr. Wilson

Will do. And thanks for the lift. It would have been a long, lonely, and much-less-entertaining walk.

Abbie

You're welcome - 'young lady'. So, how was that for *my* version of 'awful'? Am I gettin' the hang of it?

Dr. Wilson

You know, you're right. That would have embarrassed me before, Abbie. Young lady, my foot! Now? I don't mind having my age referenced, at all. I've earned the right to be here. You're catching onto this stuff really fast, though.

Abbie

Maybe because I've been guilty of it? Comments - disguised as praise, huh, 'Dear'? Ha! I can do better. I will do better, Dr. Wilson. I'm on it.

Dr. Wilson

I agree. So can I. Thanks again, Abbie, for the lift. I'll see you on Zoom Thursday night.

ACT 2

We join a Zoom meeting in progress with Abbie, Dr. Wilson, and two nursing home residents, Phillip Jiminey and Graham Gollie (their stage names).

Dr. Wilson

Now that you've all been introduced... Phillip Jiminey – and Graham Gollie – are their stage names, Abbie, to protect those who might still be innocent... Hi, Boomers!

Abbie gasps. The guys laugh.

Dr. Wilson

I always call them that! I like to get 'em going! Hey, guys? I asked Abbie before this meeting the average age of a nursing home resident... Guess what she said, Phillip?

Phillip Jiminey

Hi, Dr. Wilson. And, she said 'old'! That's what they all say.

Abbie

I'm embarrassed to say, you're exactly right, Mr. Jiminey. Was that all wrong?

Graham Gollie

Depends on your definition of old, Abbie! We have a couple of residents here younger than fifty, and a couple over 102. And everything in between.

Dr. Wilson

Long term care residents?

Phillip Jiminey

Yeah, we'll spend the rest of our lives here. They call this our home, and that's true, because this is where we live.

Abbie

Wow! I guess I'll have to revise my thinking. Again.

Dr. Wilson

So, Sir Phillip, Poet Laureate of Happy Valley, I hear you have a poem for us? And then Master Graham has written another one of his award-winning parodies?

Phillip Jiminey

I have. And he did. Mine is based on recent sociologic observations about aging that we would like to refute as quickly and cleanly as possible. I have no idea where these dumb-assed ideas come from! I'll go first.

Dr. Wilson

Okay, then Phillip, why don't you read us your offering, and we'll see if we can resolve the mystery of its origin.

Phillip Jiminey

Without further a-do-es - or, a-don'ts-

Aging like the tortoise... By: Jiminey

If 60 is the new 40, where did this paunch come from?

If 60 is the new 40, why do I feel like I'm done?

If 60 is the new 40, where's energy to spare?

If 60 is the new 40, why did it take all my hair?

If 60 is the new 40, how do I explain these scars?

If 60 is the new 40, why did I buy these old cars?

If 60 is the new 40, why can't I lounge in bed?

If 60 is the new 40, why is my sex life dead?

If 60 is the new 40, where did my hearing go?

If 60 is the new 40, why is the going so slow?

I will tell you why:

'Cause, 60 ain't the new 40, for those of you poor at math,

60 ain't the new 40, it's part of the aftermath.
60 ain't the new 40, it misses by exactly one half.
60 ain't the new 40, it's good just not pushin' up grass.

The only way 60 is 40, is - for those of you with the
nerve-

The only way 60 is 40? is if you've been well-preserved.

The only way 60 is 40 is if you've been cryo-frozen,

The only way 60 is 40, is if those 60 were well-chosen.

One other way 60 is 40, is if your total life was a bore

That way you feel 60 *at* 40, like buying years at a
discount store.

There, you have it. My ode to normative sociology.

(All - a round of applause.)

Dr. Wilson

Wonderful, Phillip. Profound, yet persnickety.

Abbie

Snarky, yet spunky!

Dr. Wilson

That'll teach 'em! And I hate the word spunky! Makes
me sound like I'm quivering on the brink. What do you
think, Abbie? You ready to get older now?

Abbie

I'm in little position to judge your work yet, Mr.

Jiminey, but I enjoyed your perspective. Dr. Wilson and I had talked about denial? This is anything but. So, you're saying that life is really all downhill after 50?

Phillip Jiminey

No, Abbie! I'm just saying that in mid-life you have so many responsibilities and burdens, it's easy to project forward. You think that this is the way life will be. Forever. But this 60 is just a new 60. Next time, when I present 'How the Nineties beat the Eighties', you'll see where I'm going with this!

Abbie

So, this is just one episode in a life's journey?

Phillip Jiminey

It was meant to be an awakening dose of cold reality, lest all you youngers set your hopes too danged high.

Abbie

Well, then. Mission accomplished. You've definitely downsized my hopes. I'll wait for your next chapter. The one that restores them all.

Dr. Wilson

Thank you, Phillip. Okay, Graham, as always, Phillip will be a hard act to follow. The floor is all yours.

Graham Gollie

How appropriate. I like to work my way up.

Dr. Wilson

Tell us about this session's parody. I assume that's what you've done?

Graham Gollie

Yep, it's what I do. I'm a one-trick pony. It has to do with one of the great mysteries of life. It's kinda like, what? Cold fusion? Or thermos bottles - that keep things both hot and cold? It is about: getting older - without getting old. 'Teflon aging'. With content, of course.

Abbie

I can hardly wait.

Graham Gollie

Hang on to your life jackets. I'm about to sing. There may be tears:

They call the old: Pariahs.

By: Gollie

In the Western world, we have our fears

About our death and dyin';

It makes our quest for long life clear,

Yet we name the old: Pariahs.

Folks like them have taught the world

'Bout truth and hope and tryin',

Olders like them have our flag, unfurled,

Suffered war, hardship, and dyin'.

Pariahs. Pariahs.

Before I knew Pariah's name

I imagined wails and whining
When I was young, I wanted age,
Not worried more or less 'bout dying.

But then one day, it came to me
I was no longer youthful
I wanted still, to get real old,
More couthful, and more truthful.

Pariah. Pariah.

In the Western world, we have our fears
About our death and dyin';
It makes our quest for long life dear,
Lived enough to be called: ' Pariah'?

Pariah. Pariah.

In this Western world we have those fears
So many, not worth counting,
Except for one, that lifelong fear,
And panic might be mounting.

I'm feeling lost, I'm lonely here,

What scares me, I hold dear.

I want to live for many years

But not to be 'old' - am I clear?

Pariah. Pariah.

Bring those years to me.

Pariah? Pariah?

(A silence. Then raucous applause from the three.)

Dr. Wilson

Graham, wow! You've outdone yourself this time! How haunting - and how true.

Graham Gollie

Yes, I may have. I think I should've stopped at The Old Gray Mayor... now, everyone expects more.

Abbie

I loved it! May I share it with my Generation Z friends?

Graham Gollie

Are they 21 or older? Such graphic honest content, you know? Can they stand the uncouth? Of course, you can. Maybe it will go vitriolic.

Dr. Wilson

Do you mean viral, Graham?

Graham Gollie

Like she said, Abbie.

Abbie

I think they can handle it. Reality bites, right? I really enjoyed the creativity of you two, with your very own distinct views about ageing.

Graham Gollie

I would like to point out one simple, profound truth to both of you academic types, however. Words to the wise to ponder.

Abbie

I'm ready. I'm taking notes.

Graham Gollie

Reality being what it is? You're about to get a huge boost in the purchase of your ideas about ageism, from maybe the least-expected corner. Anticipate it.

Dr. Wilson

I think I know where you're going...

Graham Gollie

**Ageism is the first real form of discrimination that many white men have *ever* encountered. In their life.
(Pause.)**

Dr. Wilson

It's true. Most of the heavy lifting against ageism – like many other injustices - has been done by women.

Graham Gollie

Some white guys – not all, but some – will eventually do the uncomfortable reckoning and ownership work that's involved. They just might become your most

vocal advocates. Use these converts! These 'prodigal bums' will put the 'age' in rage!

Dr. Wilson

Good insight, Graham. We'll hope for that eventuality. Okay, guys, I do so appreciate your goodly works and cogent thoughts. We'll schedule our next 'spontaneous' event when you have more works to present, as usual? Keep me posted. We're looking forward to it.

Phillip Jiminey

Of course. And you keep us in touch with your on-line classes.

Graham Gollie

We share 'em with all the others here who can get it. That's about half of the residents – and even a few of the staff. They really look forward to it, and we *are* changing people's minds. One neuron at a time.

Dr. Wilson

We hope to, as well. Keep up the good work. I'll end the Zoom meeting now. Bye, Boomers! (She does.) So, they publish their creations, Abbie, along with the artwork that's done in the Activities Department, in their monthly newsletter. There are years of archives.

Abbie

Wow. Then, Dr. Wilson, do you still have time to talk about this more tomorrow morning? We're still on?

Dr. Wilson

Yes. See you at nine. Your last day of break? Thanks for coming. It was fun to see 'the oppressed extremes' convene. G'night.

Abbie

Ha! Sounds like a great name for a rock band! Thanks for having me. I wouldn't have missed it.

ACT 3

A summarizing Zoom call between Abbie and Dr Wilson.

Dr. Wilson

Hi, Abbie! An interesting and unexpected week for you about some 'prejudicial considerations', I hope! What are your thoughts now, about ageism? Is it a thing?

Abbie

Oh-mi-gosh. Dr. Wilson, I can't look now and not see it. Youngers and elders are bombarded by it, as is everyone in between. It's inescapable. Suffocating, yet predictable, you know? A comfort prejudice.

Dr. Wilson

And a harmful one. So, now that it's hard to unsee, are you doing anything differently, is the question?

Abbie

Of course. It's not, if, but how big to go, actually.

Dr. Wilson

Go on.

Abbie

Now, blinders off, I'll spend the rest of my life personally trying to be less ageist. But this has so deeply permeated my life and thoughts! I'll try to forgive myself when I fail, but I do a lot.

Dr. Wilson

It's hard to change a lifetime - and a mindset. But be kind to your history, Abbie - your 'here and now' self, and your future self. We can all do better. I have to keep working on this every day.

Abbie

Really? But you're doing so much more than just working on *you*.

Dr. Wilson

I've been working on ageism for over a decade now. I hope to continue for many years. But I have a thought or two about intersectionality that I'd like to share with you, as we finish up the week. It's sort of what brings it all together. Your final lesson. Do you know the term?

Abbie

Intersectionality? That idea from the eighties - Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw? Okay. I'm ready.

Dr. Wilson

We all know the classic targets of prejudice. Blacks. Women. Latinos. Asians. LGBTQs. Immigrants. All treated as stereotypes. As 'others'. As... burdens.

Abbie

All members of a group that are thought of as so very different from us, yet all alike each other. Prejudices are stereotypes, on steroids. And the oppressors try to legitimize the inequality that they have *built into the system*— and, desperately, try to explain it.

Dr. Wilson

And those who are affected, are drug into that

prejudice – they take it inside themselves. It's not like they had to 'buy into' a bias. They had it built in.

Abbie

Absolutely. It seems so clear, now. Then they grow up, thinking – believing, feeling – that they're inferior.

Dr. Wilson

And they grow old, believing the same thing. Reinforced in hundreds of ways, every day. For decades.

Abbie

Okay? I'm starting to understand just how deep this runs. The oppressors in this case *also* happen to be the oppressed... They? Are *us*. We are downing – we're drowning - ourselves.

Dr. Wilson

Abbie, who's getting older? Ev-er-y-bo-dy! Who strives to die young? No-bo-dy! So, tell me? Do you see it? Do you see a strategy? The synergy in these 'isms'?

Abbie

Help me.

Dr. Wilson

In our mindless absorption of those lifelong messages that swirl around us, we're in collusion with our *own* disenfranchisement. We are our own worst critics.

Abbie

We're aiding and abetting the injury! It's not intentional, but it is self-inflicted.

Dr. Wilson

Exactly. Getting old is a remarkable achievement – and an opportunity. But Ageism has been ingrained in us. So, let's *use* it. Use it along with all those other isms. Use them, together.

Abbie

So... if ageism affects every one of us... to our very own detriment...

Dr. Wilson

And if we learn to identify that prejudice against ourselves, within ourselves....

Abbie

And, if we also happen to suffer from other prejudices, too...

Dr. Wilson

Then that is what Crenshaw called intersectionality - an intersection - where different forms of oppression reinforce and compound each other...

Abbie

Then... if we fight to correct the prejudice against elders that we all have within ourselves... we all chip away at the fear and ignorance that is in *all* our prejudices?

Dr. Wilson

Which makes ageism a personal way to feel - and really understand - prejudice. And now, Abbie, you're connecting the dots.

Abbie

**My gosh, with your help, Dr. Wilson. What a big view.
But, yes, I do think I get it .**

Dr. Wilson

**Let's take it one step further, if you're ready? To take
home and think about.**

Abbie

In for a penny...

Dr. Wilson

**Ageism then becomes an ideal vehicle for what we call
'compound *advocacy*'. Understand how it could do
that?**

Abbie

**I can! Because, though we're maybe all the victims of
ageism, but we're also often the victim of a lot more!**

Dr. Wilson

**We *all* experience aging. Then we learn to feel – just
like other groups before us - that prejudice always
involves fear and misunderstanding.**

Abbie

**And we all have skin in the game to do something
about the prejudice called Ageism.**

Dr. Wilson

**And then? Once we have gained some experience in
dismantling one harmful prejudice, and see the good it
can do...**

Abbie

Then, we can start to undo some others! Is that it?

Dr. Wilson

That, Abbie, is *it*. Our one near-universal prejudice, called ageism, gives us the buy-in. And, undoing it gives us the tools and the learnings to use to fight all prejudice. How's that for a workable model?

Abbie

So, we undo unto others as we undo unto ourselves?

Dr. Wilson

I could not have said it better. To make ours a better world – for others, and thus, for us. Abbie, my young fr – oops – Abbie, my *friend* - I think my work here is done.

Abbie

Ageism makes growing older so much harder for everyone. So, it *is* an issue for me to call out. You're giving me an invitation – but also a way to change - the conversation, and the way I think about stuff.

Dr. Wilson

So, that's what it means to be an Anti-Ageism advocate. Or even, activist. What's that make you, Abbie?

Abbie

An Anti-Ageism convert? An 'older-in-training'? Sign me up! I want the world to be a different place for those of us lucky enough to get there.

Dr. Wilson

I love it! Sign me up, too. This *will* be a revolution. And, Abbie, this is how a revolution starts. Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come! So? Tell me. What groups do you belong to? And that's where we'll start back with you this coming school year.

Fade to dark.

THE END