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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- 1. Identify at least three factors that influence the aging experience.
- 2. Define health and wellness within the context of aging and chronic illness.
- 3. Describe the trends seen in global aging today.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*I believe a human life is like a river, meandering through its course, rushing through rapids, flowing placidly over the plains, twisting and turning through countless bends until it spends itself. It is the same river; yet it looks very different from one place to another. So it is with our lives; circumstances vary from one time to another in the course of a life but there is also value to living.*

*Georgia, age 80*

*Caring for older adults gives us a unique opportunity to influence their quality of life in many ways.*

*Nursing student, age 19*

aging is part of the life course. Caring for persons who are aging is a practice that touches nurses in all settings: from pediatrics involving grandparents and great-grandparents; to the residents of skilled nursing facilities and their spouses, partners, and children; to nurses providing relief support in countries outside of their own. Holroyd and colleagues (2009) have estimated that "by 2020, up to 75% of nurses' time will be spent caring for older adults" (p. 374). The core knowledge associated with gerontological nursing affects all of the professional and is not limited to any one subgroup of nurses (Holroyd, 2003).

Gerontological nurses can help shape a world in which persons can thrive and grow old, not merely survive. They have unique opportunities to facilitate wellness in those who are recipients of care. As we move forward in the twenty-first century, the manner in which nurses respond to our aging society will determine our character because we are no greater than the health of the country and the world in which we live. This chapter provides an introduction to how the nurse can help facilitate some level of health for persons in later life regardless of where they are on the continuum between complete well-being and the final moments of life.