

The elderly generally show very high interest in associating with friends and close family members. What they show less interest in than younger adults is the expansion of their social networks to make new friends.

Modern Ritual to Honor Aging

The older woman is respected in many cultures as the wise woman, the one to be revered whose advice and opinion is sought out by younger women. With the emphasis on youth in our own culture, this vital dimension of the older woman is often disregarded and ignored. As we each age, we must be mindful of the gifts that an older woman can offer. She can counsel with sage advice, she can lead and guide, and she can teach many of life's lessons. It is equally important for the older woman herself, the crone, to feel valued, appreciated and powerful.

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Hold up a mirror and look closely at your face. Take your time, and take a careful look. Come to see the inner strength that you possess. Acknowledge your wisdom, your love and your beauty. You have earned this respect, from others and from yourself.

The Agony of Struggle

The word "agony" connotes extreme pain and long suffering; mortal agony is the futile struggle that comes before death. The word agony stems from the ancient Greek word meaning "struggle." The Greek word, however, also contained the sense of competition at philosophical debates, public issues, beauty contests, literary and musical events, and especially the athletic games. These contests pitting rival against rival were called *agones* - fights or struggles for supremacy, for survival and conquest. The most ancient *agones* were sacred competitions following funerals, especially of



The overall difference in life expectancy at birth in the United States is about 7 years (i.e. 72 for men vs. 79 for women); and at every age women, on average, can expect to live longer than men.

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heroes or leaders, as Homer describes in the Iliad to honor the death of Patroc1es, friend of Achilles.

November 4-17, Plebeian Games

The Plebeian Games, or "Games of the People," were held in Rome. They were first mentioned in 216BC and firmly established as an annual event by 220BC. The central event was the Feast of Jupiter on November 15, or the Ides.

Funeral games following religious services at the grave site were customarily held by the Etruscans, the early settlers of the Tuscany region of Italy, who passed on the custom to the Romans. Contest and rivalry for the prize in such events as the foot race, boxing, wrestling, long jump, javelin throwing, and chariot racing may have been a way to express and channel the strong emotions of anger, rage, and grief among the friends of the deceased. Though the origin of the games, the "Agones," or

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Ludi as the Romans called them, was funereal, they grew in size and popularity as Rome itself grew. Annual games to honor deceased heroes were instituted and even added to the religious calendars combining athletic events with competitions in poetry, drama, and music. Eventually, games were established to celebrate events not associated with a funeral, yet they always maintained their religious character, including sacrifice to a deity. During November, the Plebeian Games, the "Games of the People," offered Roman citizens two weeks of clever theatrical presentations juxtaposed with athletic competition. These games were a tribute to the best minds and bodies of the times; they were a religious ritual in November.

The Games of the People were established in the third century BC and held for several weeks in the first part of November. They marked the second most popular and impressive games held during the Roman year, the first being the Roman Games in September. The focal point of these games was the Feast of Jupiter, held on the Ides.

The first week, November 4-12, was set aside for theatrical and scenic performances. The last three days, November 15-17, were given over to the athletic games held in the Circus Maximus.

The two-week event began with a solemn procession led by Rome's magistrates and high priests from the Capitol through the Forum along the Sacred Way to the Circus Maximus.

The eight days of theatrical events were a busy time for art patrons in ancient Rome. Plays, both drama and comedy, were important aspects of Roman religion. A number of religious rites that we have already discussed were always accompanied by games: the festival of Dea Dia in May, Magna Mater in April, Apollo in July, and Jupiter in September. Both the Greeks and Etruscans held funereal games in honor of the deceased, while the regular Greek games such as those held every four years at Olympia (actually there were four or more pan-Hellenic games) were in honor of a deity. At the New Age, or saeculum, of Augustus in 17BC, very special Saecular Games were only part of the ritual for the New Order of Ages and the millennium.

November 13, Jupiter

The Feast of Jupiter was held on November 13, marking a transition point in the Games of the People from the theatrical to the athletic. There was a solemn rite to Jupiter and a banquet.

November 13, Feronia

Feronia is a most ancient goddess associated with agriculture, for she received the first fruits as her offering. Feronia was especially popular throughout central Italy, yet she also had a sacred grove and temple in Rome. Feronia was also seen as a patroness of freed slaves, the "Goddess of Freedom" she was called. An inscription on her temple at Terracina, where slaves were freed and given the symbolic cap of the freedman, read, "Let the deserving sit down as slaves and rise as freemen."

November 13, Pietas

Pietas was a goddess who embodied the quality of respect and duty to the gods, Rome, and one's parents. The quality of devotion exemplified by a child's piety and respect for the mother or father was honored by the Romans. Pietas was depicted as a young woman often accompanied by a stork representing the loyalty of child to parent. Pietas warns us to be dutiful to parents, country, and the gods.