



presents

A film by Doïna Harap
Produced by Nathalie Barton



Solo Senior

A stimulating look at aging today, with pioneering seniors who live alone. Shot in Canada, Japan, Sweden and France, Solo Senior sheds new light on a worldwide trend without precedent in human history.

PRESS KIT

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Summary

Never in the history of humankind have so many people lived alone, whether by choice or not. Solo senior citizens top the list of these social innovators. Our newfound human longevity has resulted in a tidal wave of senior citizens, half of whom live alone. Time is theirs to fill, and they know it. According to the experts, this group is in better shape, increasingly well off and more highly educated than preceding generations. Today's seniors are flexible in body and mind. Some, thanks to the latest state-of-the-art robotics: anything goes that can help the new seniors meet the challenge of living longer, alone.

In Canada, France, Sweden and Japan, we meet Edna, Betty, Fernand, Yvon, Torsten, Eva, Linda, Yukie and others who share their strategies for autonomous living, while reflecting on concerns about health, relationships and work. Their vitality and life choices, along with their newfound passions, are worth the detour. Yet how are our societies preparing to meet the onslaught of this human tidal wave?

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Québec, Canada, 2006, Digital Video, Color, 52'

Researched and Directed by	Doïna Harap
Co-researched and Written by	Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol
Photography	Yoan Cart
Sound Recording	Saitou Akihisa Frédérique Heinrich Olivier Léger
Original Music	Jean-Philippe Tanchon
Edited by	Bertrand Chénier
Sound Design and Editing	Patricia Tassinari
Sound Mix	Benoît Dame
Associate Producer (Development)	Dany Ouellet
Line Producer	Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol
Produced by	Ian Quenneville Nathalie Barton

Produced by
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The experts

Jean-Claude Kaufmann, French sociologist and writer, is creator of the concept that links all three episodes of InformAction's collection on single life, "the trajectory of the self". He explores this idea in his most recent and highly popular book, *The Invention of Self*. He has studied the "solo" phenomenon across the European Union.

"In the cycles of existence, there are times when we're involved in activities that carry us along, for better or for worse. At other times we're more open to reinventing ourselves. That's what we're experiencing around what used to be the beginning of old age. Now it's more a period for potentially reinventing oneself."

Richard Lefrançois is a retired professor emeritus of the Psychology Department of Sherbrooke University and a researcher at the Research Center on Aging at the Sherbrooke University Geriatrics Institute. He is the author of the bestseller *Les nouvelles frontières de l'âge* (Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2004).

"When we say the elderly population can play an innovative role, it can mean the individual surpassing himself, achieving great things. It's still possible, since people can expect to live to 85 or 90. But as a collective social force, elderly people are going to transform society. Society changes them, but they also change it – in terms of the services they receive, in terms of their associations and the political power they represent. It's what I call a detonator of major change for the years to come. It's inevitable."

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The experts

Cynthia Schelcher and Christelle Hopfner, (24 and 25 years old respectively), are graduates of the Architecture School of Nancy, France. They were given an award for the project they presented at the international competition *Conception Espace Habitable 3^{ème}, 4^{ème} âge* (Habitable Space Conception for Third and Fourth Age). This competition required young architects to conceive an innovative environment for their eventual retirement. They had the vision to design an evolutionary building that would house both students and seniors under the same roof, living in couples or alone.

“At first, it was hard for us. We haven’t even worked yet, how can we imagine retirement? We thought we should start with research. What struck us was that the elderly wanted to live in town with other generations. Age diversity is what we wanted to develop. And they want to stay home as long as possible. That meant something adapted to life cycles. One problem is loneliness. Often, only one of the couple is left. One always lives longer. And for students, it’s similar. We leave our family, to live in an apartment, also alone. So, why not a neighbourhood that could house both groups?”

Kerstin Kärnekull. In her early 60s, Kerstin is one of the Swedish architects who have been participating over the past 20 years in research on residences adapted to the growing elderly population. Several projects are already in progress and many others are on the drawing board, such as collective housing for people ages 40 and over. Kirsten herself lives in one such home which she designed: *Färdknappen*.

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The experts

Professor Tsutomu Hasegawa. This engineer from Fukuoka dreams that robots and humans will one day live together. This concept is no longer science–fiction. An artificial island is presently under construction to house elderly people who will be accompanied by robots designed according highly sophisticated, cutting-edge robotics.

“The city of Fukuoka wants to develop its robotics industry into one of its greatest strengths. I do research on robots that have artificial intelligence. We want to create robots that can communicate with humans, robots that will do tasks dictated by humans. Then the robots will have to decide on their own to do the work. This way, elderly people will be able to go shopping or take a walk with their robot.”

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Quotes from solo seniors

"Our perceptions of our bodies are shaped by our cultures. Yet we know that our bodies are affected by the rhythms of the earth and seasons, by light and darkness and temperature changes. But we often remain unaware of these biological processes as they are happening. There are thousands of organic changes taking place. We are constantly generating and inventing ourselves."

Linda Rabin, 59 year-old, Montreal (Canada)

"Most of my friends died shortly before they turned 100. The ones who are left are pressuring me to live to 100. With age, doing housework is getting harder for me. For a long time, I've wanted a robot that could do it."

Yukie Takasaki, 89 year-old, Fukuoka (Japan)

"Färdknappen (a collective house in Sweden for the 40+) is a house for collective living. Now when I'm living on my own, I'm here surrounded by people. That is living alone, but not lonely. That's a good balance, because when I see these elderly people, and they're all 60, 70, 80 and one is 90, I see how you can live a full life even when you're older. That is comforting for me. Perhaps I'm at the 3^d age of life and as I will enter my 4th age, I'm confident I can still have a good life. I can see that in my neighbours here."

Torsten Kindstrom, 57 year-old, Stockholm (Sweden)

"Let's be honest, with the years, you develop little troubles. I have the same ones as almost everyone. The fact of working, being in touch with people of different ages... that is great because, somehow, I forget about my body, my aches and pains and, in my mind, I have the impression of still being just as young and thinking life is good, it's all ahead of me, it's extraordinary. I'm going to die young. I don't see time passing, don't see myself aging, don't see the days, weeks, months. Now I don't even see the years any more."

Betty Giraud, 62 year-old, Marseille (France)

"I still have 40 years ahead of me. It's a life of luxury!"

Yvon Castaing, 73 year-old, Paris (France)

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Director's Statement

Solo Senior is a sequel to the documentaries *SoloLand* and *Solo Parent*, in which I examined a unexplored phenomenon: the explosion of people living alone in industrial society.

Our societies don't know how to consider or prepare for this demographic revolution, the first ever in history and which some consider problematic. I wanted to explore this issue through the life stories of those most concerned.

With the help of experts like Richard Lefrançois and Jean-Claude Kauffman, I have entered the world of those I call my daily heroes, people who are innovators but, above all, endearing. By choosing protagonists in four different countries I wanted to open up new perspectives about a large segment of the world's population of senior citizens today.

What lifestyles are these solo seniors inventing in order to adapt to their changing situation? What social innovations do they propose? What services do society and the marketplace have to offer and what needs are not yet being met? How are these seniors organising their lives so as to lead a full existence while living alone? These are some of the questions I have attempted to answer.

The film takes the form of a quest, which gives each member of the audience space to reflect and to find his or her comfort level.

The trajectory of self is never simple, particularly as we age. Nevertheless, it is a fascinating journey. This is the conclusion of my adventure in the unknown land of single living.

Doina Harap

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Doïna Harap

Bio-filmography



After graduating in Philology in her native Romania, Doïna Harap worked first as a teacher and then in the film industry. Once she moved to Canada, she continued her studies with a BA and specialized in film production at Concordia University in Montreal. In 1990 in Toronto, she started working for TFO as director, then as producer. Back in Montreal in 1994, she became a free-lance director, with *La Roumanie, ma mère et moi* produced by the National Film Board of Canada, and the three part mini-series about the new phenomenon of living solo: *SoloLand*, *Solo Parent*, *Solo Senior* produced by InformAction.

She has also produced and directed *Sylvia Safdie, Earth Marks*, a film inspired by the work of the internationally renowned artist Sylvia Safdie (Honorable Mention at the Columbus International Film and Video Festival and at the International Festival of Films on Art in Montreal in 2001). She also worked as assistant-director and research coordinator of the five hour series *Au nom de tous les dieux*, directed by Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol, a Canada-France co-production.