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Why I Like Getting Older

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How old is old? How do you know when you are old? Is it a “frame of mind,” or is it a certain age? The nice thing about being a teenager, and it may actually be the only nice thing, is that you can be absolutely sure of when you are one. What about adolescence? How many “middle-aged men” have been told by their wife, “You are so adolescent.” No one ever says, “You’re such a teenager,” to a 50 year old. What is middle age? We know it’s a historical period but what about for a human?

And, then there is old age. In our politically correct era, no one can quite figure out what is least offense to “old people.” Do they want to be called, “Elderly?” What about senior citizens or “getting on up there?” This week I turned 66 years of age. My mind knows that but my emotions say, “That’s not my age; that’s my grandfather’s age.” I can’t figure out though whether I am old or not.

In June of this year, *The New York Times* published a piece entitled, “How old is old? It depends on your age.” Don’t you love that title? The following is from that article:

“Most adults over age 50 feel at least 10 years younger than their actual age, the survey found. One-third of those between 65 and 74 said they felt 10 to 19 years younger, and one-sixth of people 75 and older said they felt 20 years younger.

And at what age does old age begin? Most people in the survey said old age starts at age 68. Are they kidding? That seems way too young to me. Not surprisingly, most people over 65 have a different idea about old age. Among those getting the senior citizen discount, most say old age begins at 75. Now consider the answer given by people under 30. Most of them think you’re old by the time you hit 60.”

Surely, I personally can’t be old; I still think like a teenager or ask my wife and she’ll tell you that most of the time, I am “so adolescent.”

Exercise at any Age

When I was 55, I walked at a 12-minutes-a-mile pace. I hoped that as I got older I could continue walking 5 miles a day and that the only difference would be that in my sixties, I would do it at 13-minutes-a-mile; in my seventies I would do it at 14-minutes-a-mile and in my eighties I would do it in 15-minutes miles. That was not to be. For my sixty-sixth birthday, I will walk 6.6 miles and in anticipation of it, have repeatedly walked 5.5 miles in 66 minutes. That’s a 12-minutes-per-mile pace. I wonder if when I am ninety whether I will be able to walk nine miles or not. As the old adage goes, “time will tell.”

Remember, only people who are not moving are dead; so, if you don't want to be dead, keep moving.

Whether I am old or not, I am glad that I am getting older

Rather than spending too much time trying to decide whether I am "old,; I have been thinking about why I am enjoying getting old, of course, what that really means is, "Why I will enjoy getting old when I 'really' get there." I wonder if I will know that I am old, when I am.

Recently, I realized that one of the greatest benefits of getting old is that as I age, I am much more aware of what I don't know. And, this happens before dementia, senility, or Alzheimer's sets in. Age has a way of making us aware of how much we don't know and have never known. And, more importantly, as we get older, we have the humility to admit that we don't know. As we get older, it is easier to accept who we are and to find value in what we are rather than being preoccupied or fretting over what we're not. The child's sense of invincibility and of limitlessness is finally gone.

Humility is a gift most often given to those who have attained "senior status"

In the New Testament, in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John, the story is told of Jesus being confronted by a group who had caught a woman in adultery. They brought her to Jesus and expected Him to pronounce judgment upon her, which according to the Law would be stoning to death. Jesus did not object to the Law but provided a new standard for who could execute the sentence. He said, "Let he that is without sin cast the first stone." The Bible says, "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." (John 8:9)

The old men went away first; they had lived long enough to know that they were not qualified to execute judgment upon another. The elderly are not comfortable with or complacent about their imperfection, but they are immediately aware of it. It takes the young a little longer to figure out that by whatever standard they are judged, perfection is not a trait with which they have to deal. It is not that older men cannot recognize evil or error, or that they have changed the standards of righteousness, but older men and women recognize that they are not qualified by Jesus' standard to be the judge, the jury and the executioner.

The new standard of excellence in "old age"

As we age, we still have passion but it is not as mindless as it once was. I like getting older because the passions which drove me when I was younger, along with the insecurities and the ambition, have been replaced with a commitment to a new standard, which can be summarized by one of my personal mottos, "I want it done right and I want it done right now." Yet, the desire for things to be done right is balanced by the wisdom of knowing that it is possible to be right and not to be righteous, or said differently, "it is possible to be right without having the right motive or intent." Whether we believe in a

final judgment of our lives or not, we all know that our lives will be weighed in a balance and it is our desire “to be weighed and found not to be wanting.” The weights which will most effectively counterbalance the deficiencies of our lives are compassion and mercy. It is the elderly who intuitively understand the Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.” This does not invalidate truth but as we get older, being acutely aware of our own inadequacies, we are less inclined to reject others because of theirs. That is a good thing about getting older.

Rediscovering what I know

I like getting older because I find that I increasingly have more pleasure in rediscovering old experiences than in having new ones. The things which fix my attention are more often the familiar rather than the new and unusual. Mental images are the substance of our memories and the most powerful images are the first formed when our old experiences were new. Reliving the content of those earliest mental pictures and keeping them sharp, clarifies what we value and what gives our life meaning.

This is why we celebrate anniversaries. While anniversaries are measured in years, it is not that we only celebrate endurance, but we relive those earliest steps we took into new relationships. Now, that which was once new and which is now old, warms our heart and brings a smile to our face. The endurance of those relationships enhances their meaning and the reliving of them allows us to cherish the realities which created our mental images. One of the sadnesses of getting older is that those we love who are new to our circle of intimacy, such as grandchildren, do not share our mental pictures and experiences, and try as we might, they will never. In this regard, our greatest hope is that their own mental images will be as rich and as powerful to them as ours are to us. The caution for me, as I get older, is not to reject new experiences because of the pleasures of old ones.

Giving and receiving

I like getting old because increasingly I find more pleasure in giving than in receiving. One of my greatest frustrations in life was what to buy my father for Christmas. It was not because I didn't want to buy him something but because there was no THING which would bring him pleasure and delight. Now that I am the grandfather, I understand. Getting is not nearly as much fun, or as satisfying as giving. Again, the foundation of the pleasure of getting older is the increasing wisdom which guides your decisions and actions and which replaces the joy of getting with the delight in giving.

It is as I get older that I have those in my life to whom giving brings me such joy: a wife, children, spouses of children, but then the ultimate object of joyful giving, grandchildren. If you have them, you can skip this section because you already know. If you don't have them because you're too young, read on and salivate. If you don't have any of your own, adopt someone else's. Gene Perret said, “What a bargain grandchildren are! I give them my loose change, and they give me a million dollars' worth of pleasure.” In reality, the

great thing about giving is that it is in giving that we get. As we get older, we have the wisdom to know and act on that reality.

Poignancy

I like getting older because the older I get the richer my memories become, as more of those who are the substance of those memories are available only through mental images. The “golden years” are such because of the treasury of our memories which gleam and enrich us. This reality is celebrated in the lyrics of Sigmund Romberg’s composition, “Golden Days”:

“Golden days in the sunshine of our happy youth
Golden days full of innocence and full of truth.
In our hearts, we remember them all else above,
Golden days full of youth and love.”

Many great universities adopted *Gaudeamus Igitur* as their graduation anthem. The Latin words of the song declare:

“Gaudeamus igitur
Iuvenes dum sumus;
Post iucundam iuventutem
Post molestam senectutem
Nos habit humus...”

The words mean:

“Let us live, then, and be glad
While young life’s before us!
‘After youthful pastime had,
After old age hard and sad,
Earth will slumber o’er us...”

Brief is life, and
Briefly shall be ended...”

Wise words! Solomon wrote such words in Ecclesiastes, when he said: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

I like getting old because it is my turn to teach another generation to seek happiness within the constraints of duty, honor, responsibility and decency, and with the content of faith and truth. Perhaps we can all remember our Creator in the days of our youth, and when the days of our youth are gone, we can remember those Golden Days, which will then warm our hearts and lives always.

I like getting older, except for that pain in my right knee.