Old! (Or Rants by a seventy-seven-year-old woman.)

We were the first generation to make people sit up and notice the word ‘teenager.’ We were at the start of the swinging sixties and made everyone aware that being a teenager was the hippiest thing to be. We invented pop festivals, free love, and the widespread use of Marijuana.

In our twenties and thirties, we were at the start of an age when the advent of the contraceptive pill meant we had control of our bodies and could choose when or if to start a family. An age when prenatal classes were the norm and fathers were present at the birth of our babies. We took our babies to mother and baby groups dressed in our short, mini skirts and dared anyone to object to us breastfeeding in public. Probably at the same time as marching for women’s liberation and burning our bras.

By the time we were forty we were declaring that this was when life begins and at fifty, we were refusing to knuckle down to middle age. Right up to our seventies we have made it known that our generation has always been the best thing since sliced bread.

Then horrors of horrors we are nothing! Just old. No longer trend setters, go getters, no longer the coolest, hippiest people on the planet.

It may be that every generation feels the same way, but I’ve got a sneaking suspicion that the sixties generation are finding it harder to come to terms with old age than our predecessors did. With this in mind I have tried to describe my feelings about getting old whilst talking about some of the contributing factors along the way.

If I’d have known, then what I know now I would have been a better nurse! But I could not have known then what I know now because I wasn’t old then!

I couldn’t have known then that getting up to pee several times a night was a necessity not just an old woman being a pain in the neck. I couldn’t have known that someone who could easily sleep twelve hours a night could turn into someone who never slept more than two or three hours at a time, and that’s on a good night! How could I have understood at the ripe old age of eighteen what delights were waiting so many years down the line.

The first thing I noticed, apart from the knee and hip that needed replacing was the way my pee smelt the same as the pee that I’d smelt when emptying hundreds of commodes during my career. It suddenly dawned on me that the smell was familiar and later where I’d smelt it before. I suppose one could argue that if I’d hadnt been a nurse I would never have noticed the smell of the pee and therefore wouldn’t have recognised it as an early warning sign of what was to come. But I was and I did, so I thought I’d share that even if you think its too much information.

Old age is a complicated thing. A set of symptoms that can vary from person to person depending on lifestyle (in my case not one to be totally proud of), privilege, occupation, life experiences and many other circumstances. For instance, someone sleeping rough for many years is not going to be as a rule as healthy in their old age as a personal trainer who has looked after their body and lived a more comfortable lifestyle.

I suppose I fit somewhere in the middle having been brought up in a hard-working, working-class family just after World, War two. We ate well having a much healthier diet than most kids of today and we led a very active childhood, again better than the kids of today. However, at the age of eighteen I started nurse training and began the assault on my body. Late nights, alcohol, cigarettes and, of course the hard physical work that nursing entails. No hoists to help with manual handling in my day!

The long hours and heavy lifting eventually led to my knee being replaced in my sixties and after that experience I decided to put up with the hip pain. Now, things like dicky joints can run in families but my mum lived to 95 without having surgery. My mum wasn’t a nurse.

As I say understanding the state of old age is complicated and not easy to describe in a way that describes everyone’s experience. I can’t even begin to describe the experience for a man because I’m a woman and wouldn’t presume to even try.

I am going to describe my own experiences of getting old in the hope that it will help others to understand that they are not the only ones to be living through this traumatic time in our lives and also to give younger folk an insight into why oldies behave as they do. Of course, it needs to be said that it’s only the lucky ones who manage to survive life’s tribulations who actually make it to an age where they will be bothered by the challenges of old age.

The Lead up.

Go back two generations and old age appeared to start at a much younger age!

I remember my gran from when I was about 12 and she would be early 60’s. She was an old lady sitting in a corner with grey hair, none of her own teeth wearing a wrap around apron and lisle stockings which were always wrinkled like Nora Batty’s. Her bedroom reeked of vapour rub and she seldom moved out of the house. Or was that just my perception as a twelve-year-old?

On the other hand, I retired from nursing and managed to get elected to local politics and at one point spent a year as the mayor of our small town. At that point one of our grandchildren said “You’re not like normal grandmas, are you? Normal grandmas sit around the house knitting all day!”

I don’t suppose I did fit the normal idea of a sweet old grandma but neither did anyone else of my generation. We were baby boomers, children of the swinging 60’s and we had no intention of donning the apron and picking up the knitting needles.

However, I do remember in my mid to late 50’s being absolutely exhausted after an eight-hour shift nursing the ‘elderly’. In fact when my husband questioned me on spending the money for a taxi to work rather than catching a bus I replied “ Listen here you, just because I haven’t got grey hair and I don’t wear a wrap round apron doesn’t mean I’m not old and if I want a f———g taxi to work I’ll have one”.

Of course, our mothers were really the first generation of married women who actually went to work. They took over the jobs while men were at war and never stopped.

Anyway, us girls of the swinging sixties, who had really got into womens lib, never thought that we were getting older and so we raised our kids, worked full time, and made sure we were in the swing of things, as in keeping up with fashion, hairdos, make up etc. We wore clothes that our daughters would wear, we had friends and went on girlie nights out, even weekends away. So not only did we convince ourselves that we were ageless, but we also convinced everyone else that we were as well.

We made it through the menopause, but that is a different story. I suppose that was the real start of the ageing process, but I never saw it as that because I didn’t feel any less fit and health When we turned sixty and maybe couldn’t clean the house from top to bottom in a day, we didn’t think muchof it because we were still capable of most of it and then partying the night away. After seventy was a different matter! The ageing process seems to speed up a bit and the various symptoms of old age gradually dawn on you for what they are.

Waterworks

As I said before the first thing, I noticed was smelly pee and after that a need to find a toilet not only regularly but very quickly after I’d noticed that full bladder feeling! Managing to hold it all day was a thing of the past. I remember managing all day on a trip to France when the public toilets were all still a hole in the floor and I found them disgusting. I’d have to use them now despite the danger of falling into them now my balance isn’t so good.

As time progressed the under carriage seemed to show the result of giving birth three times and as a result things on the waterworks front got more complicated! An urgent need to pass water resulted in a dribble and then five minutes later the need to repeat the exercise. Then there is the need to drag yourself out of bed several times a night to use the bathroom only to produce the same measly amount. I remember back in my nursing days getting so exasperated with elderly ladies doing exactly the same thing. No one ever taught us about this during my training.

Something must go on in the brain at this time of life because you can be going about your day quite happily but as soon as you think about weeing it’s almost immediate, you’re dashing to the toilet hoping to get there before you dribble into your nice clean knickers and trousers that you only put on twenty minutes ago.

The wish to avoid all the above mentioned is so great that a lot of people resort to rationing their fluid intake, a very dangerous thing to do of course. My mother refused to drink anything after 6pm and as a result experienced several episodes of the dreaded UTI (urinary tract infection) yet another joy of old age. The practice of rationing fluid intake can also cause dehydration which can in turn lead to stroke and heart attack, so best avoided.

Self Image.

Oh, to see ourselves as others see us! Perhaps better not to! I find it’s a mistake to go anywhere near a mirror when I get out of bed nowadays but give me a couple of hours to pull myself together, have a shower and wash my hair and I can face a mirror and convince myself that I don’t look to bad. I’ve never been one for makeup (maybe I should give it a go) but I convince my self I look better at seventy-seven than my grandma did at sixty. My clothes are better for a start, and I get my hair done fairly regularly. I keep my mind active and can engage in reasonably intelligent conversation, I have the latest iPhone (and know how to use it) I watch the latest films and like to think I’ve at least heard of the latest thing in social media. I know for instance that young people wouldn’t dream of interacting on Facebook anymore! That’s only for old people.

So, in my opinion I can match any fifty-year-old in my outlook and therefore can’t really be ‘Past It’.

However, I’m not convinced that my grandchildren see me that way!

I’ve always considered myself to be a fairly capable sort of person and someone who family can depend on. A coper, never needy and a provider. Now I’ve reached seventy-seven I detect a slight shift in my kids and grandchildrens attitude towards me. They ring me instead of me ringing them for it’s as if they’ve suddenly realised that I’m getting old. Of course, it’s nice that they care but it doesn’t help my image of myself. I’m not ready to be on my way out and I can see our relationship changing to be more like the one I had with my own mum when she got older. Actually, my relationship with my mum changed when she was sixty and my dad died. Suddenly I saw her as dependent on us and therefore we had to make sure that she led a full life by organising holidays etc.

Who cares that I’m fooling myself? Of course, my self image is nowhere near how others see me. The thing is if I let myself see how others see me, I don’t think I could bear it. I must just remember never to look at photographs.

Keeping busy.

My gut feeling is that in order to ward off old age I have to keep busy. I don’t mean by cleaning the house or baking, or knitting; I mean going out into society, doing something different with your day, giving yourself a reason to get out of bed, have a shower and wear something decent.

I am convinced that’s how my mother managed to stay independent until her early nineties. Of course, she did that by keeping a spotless house and preparing healthy meals and tending her beloved garden. Those were the things that she valued more than anything else, that and babysitting grandchildren and even great grandchildren kept her going. But that’s not enough to make me get out of bed in a morning! I’ve lived a more diverse life than she did, and my old age needs to reflect that diversity.

A couple of years after retirement I was going stir crazy trying to keep a perfect house and making Victoria sandwich cakes so when the opportunity arose, I dipped my toe into local politics! It’s not for everyone but overall, I would say that it was an interesting twelve years.

There are lots of expressions that really get on my nerves, and I must say that I’m really not keen on ‘giving back to society’ and ‘being a useful member of society’. Those two expressions suggest that if you’re not useful and don’t give back you are somehow less of a person. For me being a councillor was a much more selfish way of occupying myself. I was no longer just an OAP; it gave me a newfound confidence to speak in public and an excuse to buy a few new clothes. There was also a social life of sorts, and I found it refreshing to be in an environment where women were treated as mens equals. Don’t forget I had spent over thirty-four years in hospitals where doctors were treated like gods and most of them were men!

Anyway, those twelve years are done now and at seventy-five I decided to retire. I couldn’t bear to be the not so little old woman sitting in a council chamber, unable to hear most of what goes on and scared of speaking up in case I’m talking rubbish. Besides I’m fed up with party politics where people work for a party rather than their community. Having said all that, I think I pulled my weight as a local councillor, and I did have a bit of a reputation as a troublemaker.

I’ve always said that life is a series of phases starting with teething and very often ending with arthritis. So, I now intend to embark on a new phase, but I don’t really know what that’s going to be! What I do know is that I’ve got to keep busy. Properly busy, interestingly busy, worth getting up in a morning for busy.

Maybe travel

I have a big fear of flying and never got on a plane til I was past 40 but I realised around that time that I wasn’t immortal and if I wanted to see the world, I’d better get on with it. Fortunately, we were lucky enough to fit in and afford to do a few big trips before we got to knackered.

 I couldn’t cope with southern India now, living for two weeks in a village house with no air conditioning and an eleven-year-old son with E Coli. We were in our late fifties when we went to Australia, and we were surprised by how young everyone was. We reckoned they must pick anyone over 40 up on buses and take them off somewhere never to be seen again. Young Aussies would actually say to us how great it was to see people of our age travelling and enjoying life. We were in our fifties for Gods sake!

Anyway, I’ve been flying a lot more recently and intend to do as much of it as I can from now on even though we’ve now reached the stage where we have to book a wheelchair for my husband because of the huge distances you have to walk to a departure gate. I hope my kids won’t mind if we only leave enough money to cover the funeral costs.

As for keeping busy in between holidays, that, I’m afraid is a work in progress. I’m sure I’ll find something otherwise I fear it will be a slow downward spiral of early nights late mornings and watching tele all day in my dressing gown. One thing I know is that I will not be cleaning the house or making cakes. A bit of gardening maybe but only the nice bits like filling my backyard with expensive plants from a garden centre.

Some days now I find it difficult to summon up the energy to keep busy! I’m quite happy lounging round the house, watching television or playing scrabble on my iPad but then suddenly my mood will change, and I remember that if I’ve got any ambitions now is the time to achieve them. Leave it any longer and it maybe too late. My ambitions now seem to be about travel, I’m not interested in having a beautiful home or a fancy car, I want to go to warm places and stay in nice hotels, the sort we could never afford when we were younger. I taught myself to use technology after I’d retired and now, I’m really good at booking stuff online, in fact I’ve become a bit of a travel agent, arranging flights and airport transfers for family and friends. Checking in to flights online can be a bit scary and I’m always nervous that my printer won’t work when I need to print the boarding passes. Of course, if I was totally up to scratch with technology I would do it all on my iPhone but I’m not that much of a whiz kid.

Aches and pains. Pills and potions.

I suppose the first sign of the toll taken on my body through years of nursing was the bad backs I had at various times from my thirties onwards. On a couple of occasions, I must have slipped a disc because the pain was so bad I couldn’t get out of bed. Nowadays the legacy of that back problem is a dull ache in my back when I walk any distance. About ten years ago my back went two days before Christmas and as usual the family were all depending on me to provide the Christmas dinner. I was stuck in bed and although I didn’t know it at the time I’d torn my crusciate ligament in my knee in my struggle to carry on. Husband and Grandchildren did all the prep on Christmas Eve and on the big day I inched downstairs on my bottom to sit in the kitchen where I could supervise proceedings.

I find it hard to accept the way my body is deteriorating as I get older, it’s a shock when I get out of bed and can’t just get going. Nowadays I have to take things slowly in the morning, everything is stiff and seems to need a good oiling! I sometimes stand at the bottom of the stairs and think ‘right I’m going to run up here like I used to’. There is no chance! I hate steps nowadays, when faced with a flight of stairs it’s always a challenge a) have I got the energy to drag myself up and b) will I make it to the top without falling. Every time I get up from watching TV in the sitting room I think ‘we must change this sofa for a higher one’. The biggest frustration is my lack of stamina when I go out into our very small garden determined to make a difference and five minutes later have to take a rest because of my aching back.

I wonder how long the waiting lists is are the moment for hip and knee replacements.

My right knee had been painful for a few years and when I first saw a consultant about it, he suggested that I should try to wait a few years (I was about 63). He said that knee replacements only lasted ten to fourteen years and replacing replacements wasn’t easy. In other words, if I waited a few years, I’d probably be dead before I put him to the trouble of a second replacement.

There have been many times over the last few years when I have thanked God that I trained to be a nurse. My knowledge of the system has helped enormously in navigating through a health service that is far from perfect but still far better than the alternative. For instance, when my husband was admitted at the age of fifty-five to a geriatric ward with his first stroke, they informed us that he would be discharged after a few days and return in a week for a brain scan. Now, I knew the protocol for the management of a stroke patient and told them that if he wasn’t scanned within twenty-four hours I would go to the press. He was scanned that afternoon and then his treatment could begin. You see a stroke can be caused by a clot or a bleed and you don’t need to be a brain surgeon to realise that the treatment is therefore totally different.

After his third small stroke the consultant prescribed a new drug for my husband, and he suffered no more episodes. After about two years the local GP decided to stop prescribing this drug, so I immediately asked was that because of adverse side effects or cost. The answer was cost! So, I informed her that if the drug was stopped and my husband had a further stroke as a result I would sue. Within a week we received a letter saying that he would continue to have the said drug prescribed. That conversation was nearly twenty years ago, he’s still taking the drug and up to now has had no further problems on the stroke front.

How do people find their way through the NHS? Obviously, I have some inside knowledge, and I’m not scared of challenging authority, but most people must find it almost impossible to find a satisfactory outcome for their health needs which obviously get greater as they get older.

A lot of older people end up in a hospital bed as a result of a fall which can be a life changing event at our age and can also be the cause of so-called bed blocking. I’m not sure whether my poor balance is a natural symptom of old age or a problem with my inner ear, all I can say is that poor balance may not be an ache, but it is certainly a pain! On the days when my legs don’t feel too tired, and my energy levels are not bad I might decide to venture out for a walk or spend some time doing a bit of gardening but soon find that I’m not that safe anymore. A small step or turning a corner can put me off balance and I have to keep reminding myself to be careful. Nothing is spontaneous anymore.

I mentioned earlier that my grandmother's bedroom smelt of vapour rub, well, I’ve got a confession to make! My bedside table now resembles a Chemist shop! There are the statins which I take as instructed before bed, then there’s the paracetamol in case I get a headache, the ear drops because I take after my father who had a problem with ear wax, the olbas oil incase my catarrh plays up and yes, The vapour rub! It’s all there ready! Just in case.

What with aches and pains and high blood pressure and cholesterol and all the many other ailments we seem to fall victim to as we age, we seem to end up on a huge range of pills and potions. This I itself is enough to convince you that you are not the person you were. There are the drugs to alleviate your various ailments then there are drugs to stop those drugs from giving you even more problems, Pills to protect your stomach, syrups to alleviate constipation. If the government do stop free prescriptions for OAP most of us will never be able to afford them. I suppose that would be one way of getting rid of the huge bill for elderly care that us baby boomers are causing.

The Baby Boomer Problem

After the Second World War there was a huge rise in the number of babies born in Britain. I don’t know the official explanation for this explosion in reproduction but obviously the men who had been absent defending our country were now returned. This was also a period when the government introduced a health and welfare system that up until recent years has been the envy of the world. The aim was to make Britain ‘A land fit for heroes.

For the first time childbirth was a much less dangerous process for both mother and baby. Hospital births became much more common and there was no cost to the mother. The neonatal death rate for both mother and child must have fallen sharply. There were jobs for everyone in a country that was rebuilding after the devastation of war and a prospect of a much fairer society bringing children into the world was a much less daunting proposition.

So, we all grew up in a much-improved Britain and entered the sixties as teenagers who had the world at our feet. We might come from a working-class background but that was no longer a barrier to getting on in life. Work hard at school and you could do as well in life as anyone. In our family my brother and I were the first ever to stay on at school and then university or nurse training in my case. University fees were paid by the authorities and there was even a grant to pay for accommodation and living expenses while you studied. I was paid a small wage while I trained and got free accommodation in the Nurses Home.

Lots of us wanted to live a life our parents had never dreamed of, eating out, drinking wine, foreign travel. Very few of our parent's generation had tasted the delights that we discovered. Recreational drugs also append on the scene but although they were easily available it was not something I ever tried. I just stuck to the ciggies and port and lemon.

Lots of us Baby Boomers went on to own our own house when we settled down to married life. We had wall to wall carpets, up stairs bathrooms and twin tub washing machines. We entertained our friends to dinner, served with wine of course. In my case it was usually a Vesta (Google it). Chicken Chow Mein was my dish of choice.

To keep this standard of living most Baby Boomer wives had full time jobs and life was in some ways harder for them than it had been for their grandmothers. But we did have things like the washer, the hoover and eventually central heating to compensate for our hectic lives. The dishwasher was a very late arrival in our house.

Since the beginning of our wonderful National Health Service all working people have paid national insurance contributions and in turn we were promised free healthcare from the cradle to the grave.

Also, from the beginning successive governments have been well aware that the baby boomers would put a significant strain on the NHS one day. Not only were there more of us but people are also living longer and the older we get the more we depend on a properly funded health service to cope with problems like dementia for instance.

I remember as far back as the 1980s discussing the problems that were looming when at the turn of the century the Baby Boomer generation would hit the health system like a tsunami. They all knew what was coming but appear to have done absolutely nothing about it apart from paving the way to make sure we all get used to paying for care that we need in our old age. If we get ill and end up in hospital we’re talked about as if we’re a nuisance, we’re ‘bed blockers’ implying that we shouldn’t be there. Have they forgotten that both men and women have been paying into the system all our adult lives?

Instead of increasing capacity to cope with the tsunami of old, old people successive governments have reduced NHS beds and encouraged private businesses to take over care of the elderly wherever possible. Let’s take Dementia for instance, isn’t it a disease like arthritis, heart disease or cancer? It’s a health problem so how have they been allowed to treat it any differently? The sudden increase in people living into their eighties and nineties has been expected for many many years and nobody has done a damned thing about it. So much for ‘From the cradle to the grave – free at the point of delivery.

Positives

This might be a difficult section, but I want to be positive!

Not having to get up at 6am

Reading til the middle of the night without worrying that you’ll oversleep.

Not having to speak to people you don’t like when you happen to meet them in the street.

Having the time to cook a proper meal.

Actually, making your own Christmas cake.

Shopping for clothes in the week when the shops aren’t so busy.

Going on holiday during term time when prices were much cheaper. My husband was a teacher and so we always had to take holidays at the most expensive time.

No more boring meetings where you felt you had to impress the boss.

Meeting friends for coffee.

Grandchildren.

Choosing how you spend your days.

Not getting up when it’s still dark to go to work.

No body telling you what to do.

Never eating my crusts

I’m still here!

Covid.

There have, of course been wars, natural disasters and epidemics during the last 75 years but in Britain we have by and large been blessed. I remember in my childhood being aware of the outbreak of polio, but I can’t think of anything that has affected the whole nation in the way that the Covid virus has.

I think it has had a long-lasting effect on everyone in one way or another.

The virus severely affected the education of our children and young adults and I felt especially sorry for the teenagers who were just embarking on the time in their lives when they could have their own social life, the kids who should have been celebrating their 18th or 21st birthdays who couldn’t even see their friends never mind party with them. The people whose working life was interrupted, or who lost their jobs, their businesses, the isolation of people who were working from home and of course the emergency services and hospital employees who had to keep working and therefore putting themselves at risk every day.

Every age group was affected in different ways and the elderly population was no exception.

I’m not in a position to describe what if any long term changes the virus has brought about in other people but I think that it has had a profound effect on me and has changed the way I live for ever.

Because of our age and my husband’s health problems we more or less shut ourselves off from society for the best part of two years. Even after lockdown we kept ourselves to our selves and were reluctant to go back to our pre Covid way of life. We carried on doing the shopping online for a long time and wore masks long after most people had ditched them. My husband broke the habit of a lifetime and never set foot in his local pub for two years. We seldom eat out now partly because I’ve become to mean to spend the money. The only time we venture into town now is when we collect our prescriptions.

Neither of us have ever been good with money and before the start of the epidemic we never held back on spending. We had a good social life and seemed to be busy most days and one way or another our monthly income just got spent. We saved so much money during Covid that we could afford to have stuff done to the house, buy new televisions, new cookers, get someone to help with the garden and the cleaning. Our priorities have changed. Maybe with our advancing years things might have changed anyway over time, but I suspect not.

The first Christmas during the pandemic was awful. I have done Christmas dinner for 50 out of the last 53 years and for us to be spending it on our own was a surreal experience to say the least. I couldn’t see the point in doing that massive dinner for just two people. I think looking back I would rather have stayed in bed all day to avoid that awful empty feeling. I still moaned about the work involved though when we managed to have a more normal Christmas the following year.

Loneliness was a massive problem for everyone but especially for the elderly population and those living alone. As soon as we were allowed to meet outdoors my friend who lives alone would drive to our house, come in through the back gate and we would sit for hours in the garden under a gazebo.

We had a chimnea and an electric heater and usually hot water bottles. We sat in the garden in blizzards, gale force winds and minus 5 temperatures! But what a relief to see another face! It almost felt like we’d had a trip out. I suppose we got used to solitude during the various lock downs and I seem to have lost the need or desire to do much socialising, I’ve certainly got out of the habit of eating out! So, I feel that I’ve changed during the Covid epidemic, and I think that the changes in my case may now be permanent

Coping mechanisms.

Having watched my mother being so careful with money and refusing to make her life easier by accepting help, I decided that when I got older, I would embrace everything that was available to take the drudgery out of old age

Now that I am more reconciled to the fact that I am an old woman I find that I have a perfect excuse to pass on to others the jobs I’ve always hated. I suppose I should have included my first example under the Positive heading, but I was saving it up to use here.

I have someone to help with the housework!!! It’s been a lifetime ambition of mine but could never justify the expense when I was able bodied. What a joy to be unencumbered by those guilty feelings I used to get when our bedrooms hadn’t seen and hoover for a month, when the windows were semi opaque through lack of attention, and as for the poor old shower cubicle, well least said about that.

For the price of a meal out I get to feel free, unfazed when people turn up unexpectedly, as if a huge burden has been lifted from my shoulder. You see I didn’t marry a modern man! Ask him to use the hoover and you’d think I’d asked him to climb Mount Everest! It was easier and quicker to do it myself.

Think I really should have put that under positives!

There are other things I’ve arranged to make life easier for instance I have the chiropodist come to the house every six weeks which means that problems are nipped in the bud, my feet are always as good as they can be and I’m not tempted like my mother was to leave it til things got really bad before seeking help.

I’ve managed to find a hairdresser who is willing to come to the house and do both of us in one sitting.

One of our younger friends will come and do a day in the garden now and then and he’ll also do any house maintenance.

We have a son who lives in the USA, and we try to visit twice a year, but airports can be a nightmare nowadays so recently we have wheelchair assistance for my husband who can not walk long distances. It’s one of those things that really make you feel past it but if it means you can see family and have wonderful holidays at the same time, I’m willing to put up with a bit of embarrassment.

Last year on a holiday to Tenerife we hired a double mobility scooter and joked that we were in training to do Route 66 on our next visit to the USA.

I hesitate to discuss healthcare in this section because it will just mean another of my rants, but I suppose I must mention the need to pay attention to your well being to make sure you keep as fit as possible.

It might some days seem to much of an effort to have a shower and wash my hair just to go out with a friend for coffee, but it is one of the things that’s keeps me sane. The more I stay in the house the bigger the danger that I become depressed, and I am determined to have a social life for as long as possible.

Attitudes.

For some reason once we get to the time when the powers that be say we can retire, we are treated like second class citizens by our society. I am told that in some cultures older people are revered and thought of as the wise ones. I don’t think you can say that in the Britain of today!

Obviously, I want it all ways! I want people to open doors, carry my bags and give up their seats on buses, but I want them to do it in a way that doesn’t make me feel like a charity case! How they manage to avoid offending my sensibilities I haven’t a clue, BUT the one thing I would ask is that they don’t call me ‘Dear’ while they’re doing it. How I hate that word it summons up pictures of frail old biddies, stumbling through life without a clue what they’re doing or a young child who is below the age where it can take responsibility for itself.

Us baby boomers are I admit a drain on the public finances. There are too many of us and thanks to the wonderful NHS and the welfare system we are living too long. We are costing a fortune in pensions, that’s got to be one of the reasons that they’ve increased the retirement age. I was lucky to reach retirement age before the retirement age was raised and I feel so sorry for those people who now have to work until they are sixty-six and even longer in the years to come. Can you imagine being out in all weathers digging the roads or building houses? Can you imagine being a teacher or a nurse when you are nearly seventy? The very thought fills me with horror, and I see it as just another example of how successive governments have buried their heads in the sand and failed to do any forward planning. The governments attitude has so far shown no respect for the state of old age. Mind you the government have had some good news recently! Apparently, the life expectancy age which has been rising over the years has stalled and in some areas is falling for the first time ever!

I often get the feeling that younger people think we’ve arrived at our grand old age and seen and done nothing. It’s as if we never experienced what it’s like to be fifteen, twenty, thirty or forty. We’ve never been young and partying the night away, we’ve never been in a position to accept or decline recreational drugs. In a society where the elders are revered maybe life experience is valued and experience counts.

In recent years there has been a huge growth in the provision of housing specifically built for older people. Someone has obviously decided that we need segregating from the rest of society and that a lot of baby boomers have become a lot better off financially then their parents were, so they’ve spied an opportunity to relieve us of some of this money by building purpose built boxes with sweet sounding names like Sanctuary and senior living where they can charge extortionate prices, and keep us all in one place. I think I would rather stay in my old house that may be in need of updating but has room for all the precious possessions that we’ve accumulated over the last fifty-four years rather than be exploited by developers as their fatted cow.

I suppose with the epidemic of dementia which seems to have gripped the older generation and the governments refusal to provide satisfactory state care for people affected by this cruelest of diseases it is no surprise that care home businesses have also multiplied. These places are not nursing homes, they do not have to employ registered nurses and staff have little or no meaningful training. Care in these places can vary enormously with some places giving the customers (that’s what we are really) value for money and others falling far short of ensuring a dignified end to one’s final days.

So much for society’s attitude to older people.

I Haven’t Got Time for This.

I’m sure by now somebody somewhere has proved that time really does go quicker as you get older! If they haven’t they should. I think about things that happened twenty years ago and to me they are recent events in life. How can I possibly have a son of fifty? How can I have grandchildren old enough to be married with children? It’s not long since I was on the school run!

I am aware though that time is getting on and I haven’t got time to waste... I’m quite happy to waste my time sitting in my dressing gown for hours putting off having a shower and making myself presentable, but I no longer have time to sit in meetings listening to people droning on for hours just because they like the sound of their own voice. I haven’t got time for that.

I haven’t got time to wait for hours on the phone in a queue listening to some God-awful music.

I haven’t got time for cleaning windows, ironing sheets and pillowcases.

I haven’t got time to spend hours planning and cooking a proper dinner every day.

I haven’t got time to be nice to people I don’t like.

My time is precious, and I need to spend my days pleasing myself.

I Don’t want to be left behind!

I’m worried about being left behind, by my family, my community, my country and the world in general. I’m scared that I’m no longer in the swing of things, that I’m not up to scratch with world affairs, fashion, popular music and modern lingo.

I try hard to keep abreast of the latest trends so that I don’t get left behind. I’m beginning to really understand what the words ‘has been’ mean. It’s hard to put into words but it’s almost as if we have to be careful in case we start to inhabit a separate universe where we are no longer part of real society.

I try really hard. I watch the news, watch all the latest stuff on the television and film, never go anywhere near the classic selection in Marks and Spencer and constantly Google the latest phrases I hear my grandchildren using. For instance, I fully understand the meaning of the words Snowflake, Woke and Cancelled. Mind you that doesn’t stop me from putting my foot in it at some point every time I have a conversation with someone from the younger generation.

I’ve always said that life is a series of phases, and I stand by that, from infancy through adolescence, young adulthood, parenthood and middle age all of life is a phase: but: through none of those phases are we segregated! Those phases are all spent living with with people who are most likely going through other phases whereas by and large older people only live, if they are lucky with their partner who is usually going through the same phase. I believe it’s because of this that this phase is felt so intensely at least that is my experience. For better or worse I’ve got time to dwell on this phase! Time to acknowledge it, to see it for what it is and to fight against.

I’m so lucky!

You could be forgiven in thinking that everything I’ve said sounds like the rambling of a miserable old woman, someone bitter with an axe to grind. I have tried to tell it like it is but I’m not miserable or bitter! Not all the time anyway. I’m grateful to have reached old age without too many scars to show. I know that compared to many, many people I am in a privileged position. I’ve been reasonably lucky in life so far and although I’ve worked hard all my life, I’ve also played fairly hard and I’m still playing as hard as I can. I am lucky to have a family around me, people who keep me going who still depend on me for support and I know I can depend on them. People who expect me to keep up my standards and encourage me and my husband to live a full life. People who most of the time treat me as someone they can still lean on and vice versa when the need arises.

I am lucky that now I don’t have to get up and go to work five days a week I can more or less decide for myself how I spend my days. I am lucky that although I’m not as agile as I used to be I can still get about and enjoy a social life. I am lucky that we both have decent works pensions which enable us to live a comfortable life. I am lucky that I have an extended family to keep me going and make sure that they keep me on my toes one way or another.

Writing everything down has been a cathartic experience almost as good as paying to see a councillor. It’s made me realise that all the things I’ve moaned about are a natural phenomenon of old age and something I must rise above. Life is precious and must be grasped with both hands. I must get over myself and accept it as just another of life’s phases. I also know that when my husband reads this, he will correct every grammatical error and put all the commas in the right place

Getting our house in order.

1. The house. We are hoarders! We don’t get rid of stuff! The house is bursting! Bursting with clothes, furniture, crockery (we do live in the vicinity of Stoke on Trent after all) and books. I constantly worry that if and when we have to downsize, we will never be able to get rid of the mountain of stuff that we’ve accumulated over the years. Our parent's mantra was ‘Waste not Want not’ and to some extent we have lived by that. On the other hand, our children are of the generation that have embraced the minimalist style so there is no way they are going to take all our paraphernalia off our hands. We really shouldn’t set store by our possessions because when we’re gone nobody will want them and our children will have to pay to have them taken away! We should use those china cups and saucers, those crystal glasses, enjoy them and not be scared of breaking them.
2. We’ve made a will. It’s something you put off for years. It’s not very nice to have your mortality brought home in such a stark way. But it’s a necessity even if you think you haven’t got much to leave, you don’t want your children left with mountains of things to sort out.
3. We’ve sorted out Power of Attorney: a must in this day and age when we are all living longer and thereby increasing our chances of developing some form of dementia. It makes sense to give your children or someone else who you trust implicitly the means to organise your affairs if you become unable to do so.
4. We decided that if there is something we’ve always wanted to do then we should get on and do it. We like holidays and so any spare money is spent on travel, fortunately for us we’ve got a good excuse now that one of our children live abroad. We visit him as much as possible and other places in between. Every time I get on my laptop and start searching for our next adventure, I tell myself that we haven’t got forever so we must get on and do it. Bit of a depressing thought but it makes me feel less guilty about spending the money.

Cautionary tales.

For quite a few years my mother- in -law had her husbands father living with them and during that time her favourite expression was ‘When the time comes’. When the time comes, I’ll get this room decorated. When the time comes, I’ll go on holiday. When the time comes, we’ll have a new television... And so, it went on. She was in fact saying that when her father-in-law died, she would start living again. As it happened that time never came because she died within twelve months of her father in laws passing so the time never came.

My own mother was always careful with money. I suppose it was understandable really because both my mum and dad came from fairly poor backgrounds and there was never money to throw away on luxuries. For example, as she got older, she took to having her hair ‘washed and set every week at the local hairdressers and we would give her a lift there and back. If we were unable to provide the lift one week, I would suggest I book a taxi for her. She would never let me book that taxi it was a waste of money, and she would cancel the appointment. When she developed dementia and could no longer cope at home, she went to live in a care home and all that money that she’d saved through denying herself the little luxuries in life was taken from her in care fees.

During the Second World War my dad was stationed in Burma, he never would talk about it, but I believe it wasn’t the best place to spend the war. After the war he resumed his work as a painter and decorator, doing a full day and often going out straight after tea to do what we called (a foreigner). That meant a bit of private work where he would be paid cash in hand. All this to save money so that he would be comfortable in his old age. He died one week after his sixty fifth birthday.

I wish they had all taken notice of the old-fashioned sayings that their generation were so fond of:

‘You can’t take it with you’

‘You’re a long time dead’

‘There’s no pockets in shrouds

My day.

Today I was up by 8:15 am and drinking my first cup of tea. It has to be tea first thing, never coffee. After the tea I progress to coffee but it’s decaf because now I’m older my body doesn’t seem to like caffeine anymore. It’s the same with alcohol! It appears that old age is taking away all the things I enjoy! That delicious cup of espresso after a meal is now a dim and distant memory.

I’ve never done breakfast but, I have to take my morning tablet with food, so I make do with a couple of biscuits with my second cup of decaf coffee.

It’s around now that I decide to make soup. If you haven’t got a soup maker, I recommend that you get one straight away. All you have to do is peel some veg, stir a couple of stock cubes in some boiling water and put it all together in the soup maker. Thirty minutes later your soup is ready to serve! I can’t describe the satisfaction you’ll feel when you realise you’ve made enough, heathy, nutritious soup for four servings and done almost nothing! I feel that I’ve fulfilled my catering obligation for the day.

The next couple of hours are devoted to working myself up to facing the day, what’s left of it, that is!

I Check my emails, check what’s new on Facebook, catch up with the latest news, and play on things like Candy Crush, Scrabble and Solitaire. I can quite happily occupy myself in this manner for a whole day, but eventually I decide that I must enter the land of the living and get upstairs for a shower. I must say at this point, that if anyone calls at our house before I’ve worked myself up to the shower my husband must answer the door because the sight of me would be to shocking for most people to cope with.

Now I’ve bothered to have a shower and made myself presentable I have to think of a small outing to make all that effort worthwhile. Maybe a trip to the supermarket, a pub lunch, coffee with a friend and on really good days a trip to Marks and Spencer’s to buy clothes I really don’t need.

Back at home after the outing I must remember to tape A Place in the Sun and maybe A New Life in the Sun. They have to be taped so that I can whiz through the ads. Around teatime is my least favourite part of any day. It’s like being in limbo, neither day nor night and to me it’s a period that has to be got through as painlessly as possible. Back in the day (don’t you just hate that phrase?) when the family were young it was a busy time, cooking that well balanced meal with a house full of tired and grumpy children, then bath time, then bedtime. I think my dislike of teatime must stem from those years when the hours between 4pm and 7pm used to loom like a mountain waiting to be scaled. So now it’s a cup of tea, cake and a Place in the sun without adverts! Heaven!

Evenings present a different challenge now that I don’t have numerous council meetings to attend and since Covid I’ve lost the habit of eating out two or three times a week. Nowadays the choice is between TV or more games on the iPad. We’ve become addicted to tv crime dramas since the start of the pandemic and get really excited when there’s a new series due to start. Otherwise, we trawl the channels looking for a film that a) we haven’t seen and b) looks as if it just might be worth watching. I see a friend for coffee several times a week and invariably the talk turns to what’s worth watching. That’s got to be a sign that we are no longer in the prime of life, hasn’t it?

Routines.

I’ve never been one for routines, never had mealtimes set in stone, never had menus set for the week or certain tasks scheduled for set days. Obviously, I had the routine of going to work five times a week but the rest of the time everything was kind of spontaneous. We did the shopping when we ran out of stuff, took the children off for a day out on the spur of the moment, we once booked a trip abroad three hours before we had to leave for the airport!

Now I find that things are a bit different, I have certain routines that I must adhere to, or my day just doesn’t seem right. I must have that cup of tea with something sweet in the afternoon and dinner must be ready by six so that I can eat while I’m watching the News. I must change the bed on the same day every two weeks otherwise I might forget altogether. I must get up at least two hours before I have to go out so that I’ve got time to get through one cup of tea and two coffees’ before having my shower etc. If I’ve got a holiday planned, I must make piles all over the bedroom for weeks before to make sure that I don’t leave something behind.

You will have noticed of course that, apart from the changing of the bed none of my newly acquired routines involve housework. If I ever get to the stage where I start planning my life round cleaning, washing and ironing then I’ll know that It’s time to give up!

Brushing it aside.

As time goes on it becomes impossible to brush old age aside! There’s the physical side of things, for instance walking anywhere outside the home is a serious affair, one has to really concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other and continually look down so that some nasty little raised pavement doesn’t get you and cause a fall that could have disastrous effects. When you’re not concentrating on the physical constraints there is the constant awareness of time passing and the worry that there is worse to come.

Of course, there are short periods of time when you manage to brush the anxieties aside, maybe a special meal out or a ride on a theme park ride that you never thought you would be able to cope with. It has to be something major to take you’re mind totally away from old age because most of the time you are constantly reminded of your ageing body either by the aforementioned physical symptoms or by peoples attitudes when you’re out enjoying yourself, pretending to yourself that you’re a normal member of society.

Am I overreacting to this ageing thing? I don’t remember dwelling on my age at any other time of my life. I’ve always been just me but now I’m acutely aware of my age, my body and my limitations twenty-four hours a day. I can’t just be me and get on with life like I always have, I have to think about the shoes I wear because I need to be comfortable and stable. I have to consider whether the clothes I buy are too young for someone of my age (don’t want to look like mutton dressed as lamb – heaven forbid!). I need to plan my day, try not to fit too much in, completing one task a day like changing the beds or bathing the dogs is a major achievement.

In my opinion it’s nigh impossible to brush old age aside! If it’s not one thing it’s another constantly reminding you that you are no longer you.

Footwear.

I’ve finally succumbed to investing in a couple of pairs of Sketchers!! They really do help with the walking and stability, but you have to enter the Sketchers phase realising that you will probably wear nothing else for the rest of your life! Since I bought mine the thought of wearing a normal pair of shoes is scary and therefore the thought quickly disappears.

I’ve never been one for what I think of as glamorous shoes (haven’t owned a pair of ‘high heels since I was about twenty-five). My shoes have always been sensible and low heeled. Even so I noticed that most other people of my age were much more gainly than me and when I looked at their feet, I saw they were wearing what looked to me like trainers. They were of course mostly wearing Sketchers! So! I got a pair and now I can’t go back to wearing normal shoes, the very idea fills me with dread.

When I bought my Sketchers, I misguidedly presumed that I was being quite trendy! Didn’t the younger generation go round in footwear that didn’t look much different to mine? The answer was NO. They wouldn’t be seen dead in a pair of Sketchers no matter what colour or style. I can’t see much difference myself, but I asked my son what he thought, and he said they were horrible! It was too late by then I’d already become addicted.

Sketchers have obviously become another accoutrement for old age. Along with the glasses, the hearing aid, the walking stick and the wheelchair at airports, Sketchers have become yet another sign that we’re past our best.

Alcohol.

Does anyone else have a problem with it? I used to really like a glass (or maybe two) of red wine with a meal followed by maybe a Tia Maria or a brandy. But over the last ten years my tolerance to any alcohol has gradually reduced to almost zero! If I have a glass of wine now it has to be at lunchtime so that the effect has worn off before bedtime. Being as I go out for lunch so seldom nowadays this means that I often go for months without enjoying a glass of wine. The reason for this self enforced abstention is the detrimental effect that any form of alcohol has on my already poor sleep pattern.

The result of drinking even one glass of my once favourite red wine is not only a very disturbed night but oddly means that I don’t even drop off to sleep easily in the first place. I lie awake tossing and turning for a couple of hours and then wake up only an hour after finally falling asleep feeling anxious, worrying about stupid things and I’m unable to brush the thoughts aside, another couple of hours in a kind of semi conscious state and feeling half dead the following day is the best aversion therapy any one could prescribe.

So, my drinking days are more or less over and if I do succumb when pressed it has to be worth the price, I know I will pay. Maybe a really good Champagne, a gran cru red wine or a whisky that is at least twelve years old. Make those sixteen years old!

Settling into my skin.

It’s been a long tortuous journey, but I think I am on the cusp of settling into my old age skin! I’m getting a bit closer to seeing myself as others see me. Up til now my vision of myself as been the same as I looked at around fifty. Obviously, I knew I couldn’t really look like that at seventy-seven years old but somehow my mind has refused to accept reality.

Just lately, though, I’m noticing my wrinkled hands and the prominent veins, my thinning, wispy hair and my legs which no longer look good without tights even with the help of fake tan. Of course, my aches and pains and my lack of stamina have been trying to make me face reality for years, but I’ve fought against it.

I’m now in the process of picturing myself more as a Judy Dench model. What a woman she is! Still working and a good ten to fifteen years older than me. She seems to have embraced old age and at least on camera seems to enjoy every minute of it.

Maybe in time I can learn to accept the comments from people who use those little phrases that are used specifically when addressing older people. You know the the ones – ‘my dear’ ‘darling’ ‘sweetheart’ etc. etc. I’m sure if I can somehow accept the fact that I no longer look like a fifty-year-old I will feel a lot more comfortable in my old age skin. The challenge is to make sure that I still take a bit of pride in the way I look and not just give up altogether and become a scruffy, smelly old hag.

I must use Judy Dench as my role model.

Environment.

I’ve got this awful sense that our house is slowly morphing into the home of an elderly couple. You know the ones where as soon as you enter there’s that smell of old age, both visually and by smell. I know of course that ours smells of cigarettes but there’s also a whiff of staleness, a sense that it’s lost the vibrancy of years gone by. I suppose we’re losing the will to be constantly upgrading, I don’t feel the need now to redecorate or change furniture and layout, I’m content to let the house stagnate. No wonder then that it feels dejected.

It also sometimes feels that very slowly it’s becoming a prison, one of our own makings maybe but a prison rather than a place to relax now and then. The lack of daily routines such as going out to work and socialising on a regular basis along with the lack of enthusiasm means that we spend more time at home but the need to constantly improve and update our home couldn’t be further from my mind.

I am conscious that the Covid pandemic has played a part in our lack of energy and enthusiasm, we did get used to a sedentary life style when we were forced to accept being incarcerated in our own home for long periods of time and the lack of socialising, shopping, meals out and moving on with things became the norm for us and because we haven’t had to jump back into mainstream life we have remained sedentary, without realising it we are spending more and more of our time whiling away the hours and days sitting in the house playing on our respective iPads! Maybe, thanks to Covid we have fast tracked from vibrant useful members of society to useless old age.

Hold on a minute! I’ve just had a splurge! I’ve cleared some of the clutter from the kitchen. Not all of it though because it wouldn’t be our kitchen if it wasn’t basically cluttered, and I’ve every intention now of cleaning the floor and washing the dogs’ beds before having a shower and going out to the shops. Not quite stagnant all the time then, I still get a burst of energy occasionally.

Bin there, done that, got the bloody T shirt.

For as long as I can remember I wanted to be a nurse and the main reason for that was that I liked old people! In my eyes they were cute and charming, they needed to be looked after, waited on and guided through the mysteries of modern life. It was almost as if they were from another planet or they were a different species, I wanted to care for them as if they were some sort of pet.

It never occurred to me that these people had lived a life that I was just embarking on, that they had the knowledge and experience that takes a lifetime to accumulate, that one day if I lived long enough, I would be at receiving end of that patronising affection. I sometimes want to yell ‘Have some bloody respect! I’m not past it yet. If I felt so inclined, I could run rings round you in whatever job you’re doing. So less of the Sweetie, lovely, dearie, sweatheart and my dear if you please’.

As I’ve said before, I believe that in some cultures older people are revered and looked up to, consulted on because of their experience. Now I’m not bothered about being revered I just want to be equal.

Once when we were visiting our son in California a friend of his who knew someone in the entertainment business offered to get us tickets to a recording of The Late Late show with James Corden. I was really excited to be invited to such a Hollywood type event until I saw the email exchange between our son's friend and the program’s producer! It went along the lines of ‘Any chance you could get a couple of seats for a sweet old couple who are over from the UK?’

That was it! The whole thing was ruined for me! We were as good as charity cases! To rub salt into sore wounds when we got to the recording studio it was obvious that we were the oldest people there by about thirty years.

UPS and downs.

It’s just after 9am and already it will go down as a good day! I’ve made soup, put the washing out to dry, cleared up the mess from last night's family barbecue and fed the dogs. Over the last few days, I’ve found it difficult to motivate myself to do anything. I’m not sure what the cause of these nonproductive periods are. I ask myself if it’s boredom, depression or a physical illness maybe brought on by a few nights of disturbed sleep. I begin to think it’s becoming a permanent thing and then I get up today and those feelings have all disappeared and I’m ready to make the most of life again. There’s a bit of a spring in my step and a determination to achieve something.

Family.

Do you know I’m not sure whether my family are trying to keep us young or kill us off. They descend on the house expecting the catering and home comforts to be exactly the same as they were thirty years ago. They expect us to be ready at the drop of a hat to go off on some jaunt or stay up late at night (maybe even as late as 11pm!!!).

I’ve forgotten what it’s like to live a normal life where I was capable of doing more than one thing in a day. For instance, if I’m meeting a friend for coffee by the time ve had the shower and put a few things in the washing machine and then gone out for coffee I’ve more or less done as much as I expect to do in a twenty-four-hour period. It comes as a bit of a shock to the system if I’m expected to, say, go out for lunch, take a walk round the park, get a light tea for everyone and then go to the pub. That’s almost a week’s worth of activities in one day!

I love to be surrounded by family and always have and I’ve done the Christmas dinner bit for almost every one of the last fifty-five years, it was always hard work but now it’s getting to be a bit too much. When I suggested that we go out for Christmas lunch in future the kid’s reaction was ‘but you love it mum, and you would hate it’. They’re right, of course. But what would really be best for me? I’m not sure.

Stimulus.

It’s amazing how certain things can put a spring in your step, fire in your belly and grease in your elbow! Things like an imminent trip abroad can prove to be such a treat for the neglected housework, especially the ironing pile and the fridge! All those sad wilting vegetables have been waiting so long to get to the compost bin!

 I find the best stimulus of all though is a good row with the husband! I can work wonders after a good set to, hoovering, mopping, cooking, ironing it’s all done in a flash. The creaking bones the constant lethargy disappear as if they were never there!

Holidays.

I have to say we’ve had some very cheap holidays in the past! Mind you in those days we couldn’t afford anything else. Seven of us (four adults and three children) once went to the Dordogne region of France for about eighteeen pounds each including the ferry crossing and a lovely old house to stay in. We went to Croatia staying half board in an hotel overlooking the sea for one hundred and ten pounds each. We had two weeks in Southern India for three hundred and ninety-nine pounds and return flights to Rome at seventeen pounds fifty per person. We also had many wonderful trips to Spain where we stayed with close friends who owned a place over there. We were lucky to have managed to travel on a shoestring when we were younger and had hardly any money. Some of our holidays were less than luxurious but always full of adventure and character building for the kids.

Our holidays these days have taken a different turn. Apart from things like the afore mentioned wheelchairs we have to have a more laid-back sort of trip, this usually means a nice hotel with lots of relaxing amenities and some on site entertainment. For instance someone asked what we expected to do on a trip to Rhodes that we were planning and our son replied for us saying something like this: They’ll get up and go for breakfast , go back to their room to take the pills, have a look at the pool and decide against it, find somewhere close for a cup of coffee, sit on the balcony, take a nap, have a pre-dinner Mojito, then dinner followed by bed. On a trip to California, we often do quite a bit of bit of travelling but we always do it the easy way in our son's car or by Uber. We nip out of the car, look at a sight, get back in the car and drive to a restaurant. Perfect! On a visit to one of the famous themes parks we sat in two wheelchairs for the day, this meant we could get around quicker and there was the added advantage of jumping the queues. Pride must abide!

I’ve just spent a lovely week on Gran Canaria with a very old friend: the one we spent so many holidays with when the children were young. We used to say that one day we’d go away on our own: just the two of us, no husbands no children no grandmothers, just us. It’s taken fourty years but at last we’ve managed it, and it was lovely. Of course, I’m not nearly as fit and agile as she is so I think I might have held her back a bit, but she didn’t complain, and the week flew by. I’m really glad we managed it in the end.

I spent a lot of time on the balcony wondering why people made it their life’s work to get up early every morning to grab a sun bed and spend ten minutes making sure they were positioned properly, and their towels were placed precisely on the bed. I could almost understand the ones who wanted to lie in the sun all day but there was at least one couple who after all that effort spent all day in the shade playing on their phones, not even going in the pool now and then. They might as well have stayed at home in their bedroom or in the hotel room where they’d got airconditioning.

 A high-tech Christmas.

I’m suddenly way ahead of my grandchildren when it comes to all the technical gadgets! My children have furnished me with everything I could possibly need to be the hippest grandma in town.

It started with a ring doorbell which I recommend to everyone, it’s a great security aid and if you really get bored you can spend your time watching people walk past your house for hours on end. It can also prove invaluable when you get fed up with answering your door only to find it’s a delivery man with a parcel for next door that he wants you to take in. (Very handy when you’re not feeling the love for your present neighbours.)

Next came an Apple Watch (latest model) which I have grown to think of as my new best friend.

This wonder of science of course tells the time very accurately but that is just the start. When linked up to your Apple Phone it will convey phone calls and messages and keep you abreast of the news and weather. Then there’s the exciting stuff! Press the activity logo and it counts your steps, monitors your sleep, measures your blood sugar, performs an Echocardiogram, and even alerts you to the fact that you are in danger of having temporary hearing loss if you are, for instance where the music is too loud. So, I can tell myself I feel fine when the sleep monitor says I’ve slept for eight hours even if I think I’ve only had four.

The last thing I got was an ‘Alexa’ and it’s the best companion to my watch! Together they have increased the number of steps I do in a day by at least 300%. This is how it works: The watch tells you you have only done about 1000 steps, so you command Alexa to play something like ‘Come on Eileen’ and before you know it, you’re walking and dancing round the house and getting those steps clocked up in no time. The side effect of all this walking and dancing is that not only do you greatly increase your activity levels, but you suddenly realise that your mood is elevated to a level you haven’t felt in months. Win Win!

This old age is getting better! What with the holidays, the Sketchers to put a spring in the step and the gadgets to give you a new interest in life things are looking up.

Changes.

I feel like I’m changing at a faster rate now than I ever have in the past! Not just physically! I am very aware now of the physical changes I’m almost starting to see myself as others see me nowadays but I’m also noticing a big change in my tastes in everything from food to music, to television programmes and even to what I spend my money on.

Since acquiring my wonderful Alexa I’m discovering a whole new world of music. Nothing as drastic as developing a liking for the classical stuff, that would be a turn up! I have always been a Rolling Stones; Beatles sort of person but now I’m finding bands I pretty much ignored the first time round. For instance, Steve Harley died the other week, and I thought i’d have a listen to the the things he did with Cockney Rebels then there’s Lidisfarne, steeleye span etc, etc.

BUT at the same time, I’m also feeling like the Covid lockdown never ended! We’ve got no transport, no energy and no motivation so we spend a lot of time sitting at home in what’s turning out to be a dreadful summer trying to find something worth watching on the television and I make shopping lists so that when we do go to the supermarket we don’t forget something. (In fact, I’m still into that hoarding mentality I had during covid) Of course we do go out: I go out for coffee three times a week and Philip does his bell ringing but in between we seem to be stagnating which seems to me to be an awful waste of time. We seem to lurch from holiday to holiday and don’t accomplish much in between. Let’s hope this is just another phase.

Indulgence.

It’s July, and I’m sitting on the balcony of the Hard Rock Hotel, Tenerife enjoying my fourth trip abroad since Christmas! Is this indulgence? Is it right to be spending our savings on such frivolous things as holidays when as a child I considered myself very lucky if my mum and dad could afford to take us to Blackpool for a few days?

I’m wearing a blouse that I paid nearly £100 for, I’ve just booked a private transfer back to the airport because the coaches in Tenerife have such steep steps, I’m already wondering where we can go next. Is it right to indulge ourselves so much or should I assuage the guilt feelings I have by telling myself that time is running out for us, and we must do what we can while we can?

My mum would be horrified! “Our Pamela you are never satisfied! “I can hear her saying it now. BUT: she would also have been horrified if she had known that all the money, she had saved through being satisfied with a simple and unadventurous old age would be handed over in the end to the owner of a care home.

The slippery slope.

Throughout my seventy-six years our country has known a freedom that the likes of my father fought to protect. We have enjoyed a lifestyle that would not have been possible if Adolf Hitler had had his way. Now, it seems to me we are on the slippery slope towards a time when we once again have to fight the far right in order to remain decent human beings. I blame the rise of populist figures like Trump, Boris and Farage for the dangerous situation we find ourselves in today. These people have preyed on the uneducated, the underprivileged, the idle and the thugs and have managed to convince them that all their troubles are caused by immigrants! .

There’s a misconception that these populist figures are men of the people! Men of the people?? Of course they’re not! They are, all three, privileged, wealthy men who are convincing the masses that they are on their side, one of them, a regular Joe. They are exactly the opposite! Just because Farage is almost always standing in a pub with a pint in his hand when you see his photograph doesn’t mean he’s one of us. Just because Boris acts a bit dense and can’t string proper sentence together doesn’t mean he’s one of us, and the same goes for Trump. Do people really believe that if we get rid of the immigrants the lives of the British working class will suddenly be transformed? That we will live in a fairer society where we all get a bite of the cherry? Make no mistake the privileged classes will always strive by whatever means to keep us in our place and will make sure that their money stays and grows with them. They will employ any distraction to ensure that we blame someone else and in so doing can get on with increasing their wealth without our interference.

I know that things are far from perfect in our country, but that’s not the fault of immigrants. The fault lies with successive governments who have not kept up with a changing world, who have not paid due care and attention to the people in our country who, for what ever reason, have been left behind, left disillusioned, left uneducated and exposed to right wing ideas which take away our humanity and play on the basic instincts of thuggery.

Snobbery.

If there’s one thing, I hate more than class snobbery it’s intellectual snobbery! Being married to someone who managed to get a PhD has meant that on a few occasions in the past I’ve had to put up with an evening in the company of people who use their qualifications to convince themselves that they are a bit above those of us who chose a different career path. Having convinced themselves they then assume a persona that if you’re not careful can leave you feeling wholly inadequate.

I’ve been in a group of the above-mentioned people who I’m afraid bring the worst out of me on quite a few occasions and inevitably at some point one of the superior beings will look at me and assuming their most condescending tone will ask “And what do you do my dear?” On one such occasion my answer was “I knock on doors selling Avon”.

On another night a very pompous professor asked the same question. The answer? “I clean up human faeces to keep Philip in academia” I admit not my exact words because I’ve cleaned it up a bit! On this occasion my husband made sure we left very quickly but not before some genteel lady said “you’re like a breath of fresh my dear. You must come to dinner sometime” that was when my husband whispered in my ear “That was not a compliment”

We were out for dinner one night when the conversation turned to ambitions. Now at that time I had three children to bring up and a full time job working nights in a hospital for the mentally ill and when they wanted to know about my ambitions my answer I’m afraid was “I want to sit around the house drinking coffee all day and go to Marks and Spencer’s once a week”.

Anyway, I’ve achieved all my ambitions now. It’s a bit boring I have to say but I suppose that I can claim success in life. I also read a lot so maybe I’ll be an intellectual if I live long enough. Is there such a thing as a Masters in romantic or detective novels?

Decrepit but not demented.

Decrepit: worn out or ruined because of age or neglect.

Dementia: a condition mostly affecting older people who have difficulties with memory, thinking, control of the body etc. that are severe enough to affect daily life.

Well! The body is definitely becoming more decrepit by the day! What with the aches and pains, the lack of balance and the general lack of willpower or enthusiasm to look after the house and garden. I’m beginning to think I’m past my best at least in any area that demands physical activity. So, I’m ready to take the label that says ‘decrepit’. I Suppose you could say I’m worn out through age and neglect, but I would also add years of hard physical labour, and I must admit play. You know what they say about nurses (work hard, play hard).

Now! About the dementia. I know that every time I forget a name or a date or something someone told me yesterday, my family are watching like hawks hovering above, waiting for me to prove to them that I’m on the slippery slope. I’m not suggesting that they are wishing the dreaded dementia on me, just that there seems to be so much of it about these days that it’s almost become expected that you’re an automatic candidate after the age of seventy. Let’s face it thirty or forty years ago no body had ever heard of this disgusting malady that now hangs like a cloud over everyone’s later years. We seem to be totally preoccupied with worry about what will happen when the scourge of dementia hits us. It’s a shame really because nowadays we spend a lot of our retirement worrying about dementia instead of concentrating on enjoying ourselves.

Don’t think I could be labelled as demented yet, but then am I the right person to make that judgement?

How to cope without a car.

Just over twelve months ago we had yet another change that was to impact our way of life. My husband was diagnosed with Atrial fibrillation and even though the medics said he could carry on driving our family had a different opinion. We decided that the risk to himself and others was too great and being that I have never been a driver we made the decision that the car must go.

When you’ve had your own transport available for the whole of your adult life to suddenly be deprived of the freedom to go where you want when you want comes as a bitter blow. It felt almost like a bereavement, just at a time when poor mobility means that a car is a necessity, we were left stranded. No more nipping to the shops because we were short of bread, no more Sunday afternoon trips to Marks and Spencer or little runs out to the lovely Peak District countryside. We were and still are to some extent at the mercy of family and friends. So, no more spontaneity in life, what on earth had we come to?

It dawned on me pretty soon that even though friends and family were more than willing to ferry us about whenever they could there would be times when no one was available to provide necessary lifts to the hospital or the chemist for instance. That’s when I thought of my Mum and her reluctance to use taxis when we weren’t available, and it dawned on me that we could pay for a fair few taxis with the money we were saving by not having a car. Ureka! I’d found a solution that went part way to making us feel less isolated and cut off from society.

From that point on the sense of loss subsided a little and now I don’t think twice about phoning my favourite local taxi firm and not just for necessary trips. If I fancy going into town for a coffee or a visit to the sale in a local dress shop, I just call a taxi and go. At first, I got greeted by people in town who I hadn’t seen for a while by things like ‘oh my god you’re still alive’ or ‘I thought you’d moved abroad’ but I’d forgotten how nice it is to walk through town stopping every few yards to pass the time of day with people you know. Being socially isolated has a real impact on your mental health and the price of a taxi is nothing compared to the cost to oneself of depression and dementia.

Onwards and upwards.

Although I’ve spent the last fifteen thousand plus words railing against the ravages of old age, the attitudes of society and the failure of successive governments over the last seventy or so years I’m not tired of this world or ready to lie down and give up the ghost.

So, despite any impression I might have given (i.e. that I am a miserable old bat) I can assure you that I intend to make the most of what ever the next few years may have in store, and in the words of the great Alan Bennett I will be ‘keeping on keeping on’.