

Empty Nesters – or, How I learned to Live with Getting Old

If you are younger than 40 years old, you may want to put this aside for about 10 years. It contains content that may not be appropriate for the younger adult. It contains descriptions that are revealing, disturbing, graphic, and sometimes realistic.

One sure sign of getting old is they call you an “empty nester”. At my church, they allow empty nesters to go to the front of the line for all potluck dinners. The pastor solemnly announces, “As it is our habit, we will allow the empty nesters to go first”. There is always some smart aleck that calls out, “Yeah, you’d better get through the line before you get run over.” The church laughs, and us grey haired folks whose children are no longer at home sheepishly stand up and start filing towards the feed trough.

There is something inherently degrading in this exercise. It is as if we would be incapable of grabbing that drumstick while pushing off some 12 year. I just know I can intimidate an 8 year old and get that piece of pineapple upside down cake they were wanting. Just because we are older, doesn’t mean we can’t fend for ourselves. We know that this preferential treatment is meant to be respectful. Once, after Sunday school, a group of us got together to talk about it: would we want to put an end to the “respectful” humiliation? After careful consideration, we decided we liked getting our food first.

One sure sign of getting old is joining a church group called “Young at Heart”. Yes, it is a play on words because everybody but us are in their 60s or older. Since I showed the most energy, they just named me the “Master of Ceremonies” for the quarterly dinners the group holds.

“I think age is a very high price to pay for maturity.....” Unknown

One sure sign of getting old is the fact that your kids get old and your father and mother-in-law get ancient. When my son turned 30, I felt ancient myself. Now, all of my kids are about over that line of demarcation. When we were in high school or college, we quoted Abbie Hoffman (Chicago Seven member and co-founder of the Youth International Party aka “Yippies”) by saying “***Never Trust Anyone Over 30.***” Now, all of my kids are over 30 so I guess I can’t trust them. I remember when I was 30 and would take my family to visit Jeanne’s parents. My in-laws seemed *so old*. They would go to bed at 9:30pm and get up at 4:30am. Now Jeanne and I go to bed at 9:30pm and get up at 4:30am. ***That is so disgusting!***

My in-laws are now in their mid-80s. I don’t know what time they go to bed but I know they take daily naps. (I’m trying my hardest to avoid daily naps but have been known to nod off at work in afternoon meetings.) When you are 86, every day could be your last. You’ve outlived everybody else and you are quickly approaching the time when you can’t take care of yourself. I can remember when they were my age. What that means is; it doesn’t take much to recognize that I will soon be their age again and this time, it will be the last time. (Think about that statement; its literal).

“I don’t feel 80. In fact, I don’t feel anything until noon. Then, it’s time for my nap....” Bob Hope

One sure sign of getting old is your body. It gets fat, you lose strength, you get reoccurring pains that hurt all of the time, and it gets harder to hit your mouth with a fork-load of food. We have a 40th high school reunion next year and I want to go to it weighing what I did as a senior (in high school, not in AARP). I have to lose 60 pounds in 7 months and I’m not sure I can do it. In an attempt to regain some of my youth and take off some pounds, I have gone to a gym every morning at 6am for the past three months. I get on the elliptical for 30 to 45 minutes and sweat like a hog. I have a very hard time getting my heart rate above 155; I just can’t go any harder. Ten years ago 170 was usually hit at the end of a workout. Acrobatically, I am in better shape than I was 3 months ago, but I’ve gained weight instead of losing it. At this rate, I’ll weigh 80-90lbs more than I did as a senior by the reunion.

“I’m not into working out. My philosophy: no pain means no pain.....” Carol Leifer

“You’re old when everything starts to click: your knees; your neck; your back.....” Unknown

“You can only hold your stomach in for so many years.....” Burt Reynolds

One sure sign of getting old is having an endoscopy. Both Jeanne and I have had our first one. (Once you start, they won’t let you quit. They tell you “Come back in 5 years and we’ll look up you again.”) One of the more interesting things that occurred to me was a conversation with my butt doctor. He asked me what medicines I was taking and I said I was taking nothing. He said, “Wow, that’s encouraging, most people your age are taking something.” ***You got to be kidding; most people my age take meds?*** Of course, he did not count my Metamucil use as “medicine”. It dropped my cholesterol numbers to the lowest they have been in my life..... that is good medicine if you ask me.

“My doctor says I look like a million dollars – green and wrinkled.....” Red Skelton

One sure sign of getting old is the impact of age on sex. This needs to be discussed and not kept as a dirty little secret. When I was younger, I was taught that the sex drive and libido of a young man was much, much, higher than his wife’s. (This seemed to have been proven true.) As they got older, the two sex curves would converge, and eventually, the husband and wife would both have essentially the same sex drive for some period of time. I always worried about this. I was concerned that they would cross sometime in the middle of the night and I would wake up only to find my wife with more desire than I had. As we have reached AARP age, our curves have slowly approached each other, and we now have the best times of our lives. They were right; our curves are coming together. I was wrong; they did not cross in the middle of the night and leave me behind.

“A sign of getting old is when you both go into the bedroom, turn down the lights, and then go to sleep....” Unknown.

One sure sign of getting old is that all of your peers start to retire. Of course, this is aggravated by the fact I know it will be 10 years or more before I can afford to retire. This year, I had two fellows (both retired) visit me that had been my bosses when I started work as an engineer at Olin. They both, in their way, were large influences on me. Tom Thomas seemed to be my boss in one form or another for twenty years. Nobody ever worked harder for Olin than Tom. Louis McCray; calm, practical, and always thinking; supervised me at Charleston, Tn, and worked with me for another 15 years. What a joy to have retired co-workers take some time to come by a visit. Us old folks have to stick together!

“Retirement is the ugliest word in the language....” Ernest Hemingway

“Me – I’m supposed to be retired with all kinds of free time, huh? Not so. Being busy is preferable to boredom any day. Larry thinks we are so busy because it takes us longer to do things.....” Pat Ancell, 2010

“What do you want to be when you grow up???? Retired!.....” Louis McCray about 30 yrs ago.

One sure sign of getting old is that you come to the realization that you are no longer immortal. When you were young, others you knew died. That was their bad luck. A car wreck, some strange disease, or somebody who was old and their time was up. Those issues didn’t apply to you. (My parents died old, their time was up. It was sad to lose them, but, it was expected and their deaths did not foresee my death.)

Somehow, someplace, you begin to understand that you are no longer immortal. Maybe it’s a medical problem that is out of your control. Maybe it is seeing a brother, sister, or lifelong friend die young. Whatever the reason, the immortality of youth drifts away, and you are forced to acknowledge that your time is coming. Eventually, how we handle this is important only to ourselves. We can find solace in God and his son; we can ignore and deny our

pending death; we can accept it and do the “Bucket List” approach. These options all have their advantages but I think the first one is best for us.

***“I didn’t have any control over how I came into this world, but, I sure hope I can influence how I leave……”
Fred Paschall***

“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it……” 1 Timothy 6:7

One sure sign of getting old is that you actually gain in wisdom (until senility takes it away). Years of experience allow you to see things from a perspective you never saw before. Things that were once important are now no longer as important, and things you ignored as a young one are now becoming more and more important.

One way the Bible defines wisdom is by how much closer and closer you are getting to God and Christ. Of course, that means you have to read the bible because it explains all of this stuff if you really study it. So, to gain wisdom means you have to read and study the Word. The bible, especially Proverbs, likes to talk about us older folks:

“The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old……”Proverbs 20:29

I can hear you mumbling to yourself, “What do you mean by all of this?” This essay has only one meaning: ***We will all get older, so, let’s have fun doing it!***

In closing, here is my favorite quote about aging:

“When I grow up, I want to be a little boy…….” Joseph Heller

(This does not mean I want to wear diapers and have a woman spoon feed me……)

Fred Paschall – Christmas 2010.