

Featured story:

GETTING OLDER

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You look into the mirror and wonder. You know it's you reflecting on the image you see before you, but it doesn't show everything. There are differences.

I don't know how many times I wrote this bit. Many. Most of the versions made me sound like a whiner, going on about nothing. Yet there were elements in there, themes I wanted to touch on. So, I'll try yet again.

You don't notice the changes at first. You get older gradually. But they are there, and they are of a continuous nature, relentless in their progress, even if they disappear from one's awareness for a while.

At one time I walked into the teacher's room and was met with a range of people, most of whom were near my age. The turnover is high and it isn't long before you open the door to an average age ten years your junior. Then it's twenty. Nowadays it's approaching thirty. In some ways, people are still nice to you, treat you alright, but you are no longer included in the party invitations.

Perhaps it's my fault, turning down those occasional offerings a few years back and not returning with my own invitations. I went the family route, focusing more on my wife and newly born child who quickly grew up to become a teenager. There are no regrets; I would do it all over again. Life is short and while I miss the intense friendships, there seemed to have been a choice, at least for me, and I took the road which I felt to be right. Some can combine the two but those few truly cherished friendships for me were many thousands of miles away. I didn't feel the need to develop further bonding with some good acquaintances, at least not if the price was less time spent with my precious family.

In my aging, those are the decisions of an older person, not from one barely containing the energy of the youth, one bursting to get out of the house and have yet another incredible night with the friends. Being older has also taken the edge off some of the hunger, so I can more easily accept not always being included, though I feel the absence deeply at times. I have forged a place for myself, at least in these insecure days, a place I can recognize and feel familiar with as long as it's there. I feel no need to feign enthusiasm in the hopes of winning future promotions or rise higher in my boss's and peers' regards. Well, the need is still there, partly for survival's sake, but it burns with less force now.

In this period of life there are still drives, strong ones, but different in some ways. I want to leave a legacy, to pay tribute to a long profession of exploration, to close with style while I am still able and willing. I push myself hard knowing the years are few ahead, at least in this phase. I try to balance the other aspects of my life and those around me, never forgetting where I am.

And it's a curious age, this one I am presently in. I have many aches and pains, malfunctionings in my body, some making themselves known in my mind. But I still walk erect. Much of me remains in the younger, purposeful world and with good fortune, the slow almost imperceptible distancing from it will not play out its heavier impact for some time to come. I appreciate what I have, while I have it. I am living in the present, with thoughts drifting back and forth to the past and future. But it is the present that I am close to. Always the present. It was there when I was seventeen. It was there at twenty-eight. And here it is now. It is in the present that the ink is flowing out of my pen onto the paper receiving my ideas. And when the words are read once again, it will be done in that ever present moment of the immediate.

In this present, I have struggles and dreams, some different to those entertained in the present I experienced long ago. And others have not changed. There is a continuity of unresolved issues, a mind set that I look through which I feel familiar with. They keep me company along with the changes. And I am grateful to all of them. They have all contributed to my feeling alive.

I don't believe I appreciate that feeling, the feeling of being alive, any less now than in my younger years. I have always wanted to live my life. And I have.

And I am.

That is what I wanted to say.

My grandmother, when she was sixty, looked old to a very young boy, then teenager. Years passed, experiences came and went, and one day I was sitting on the sofa next to her, her hand in mine. We were talking lightly, enjoying the sun coming through the living room window and having conversation simply for the warm company it provided. She told me that inside her now wrinkled and slow-moving body was a young girl. She still felt she was sixteen, inside. She felt she could dance and move and feel as the person she felt she was, not limited to the parameters set within the confines of the ninety-one-year-old body she was now occupying. She was a practical woman, weathered from the years of wise but sometimes hard choices. She was brave and did the right thing as a way of life. But she was also that sixteen-year-old girl wanting to dance.