

Curtain Call

Category: Pretending

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | October 2, 2018

Every day I become a player on Shakespeare's stage. I get up, do my ablutions, and then go about my business: writing; teaching part-time at the local university; strolling through the tree-lined neighborhood; walking to the library to replenish my supply of books; and, napping, watching television and napping again. I smile at students and colleagues, bid pedestrians a good day, and share a book recommendation with the librarian.

It is all an act: a pretense.

Ever since I turned seventy on August 8, 2017, I have lived in a state of fear. Seventy has made me feel old and vulnerable: morbidly aware that I have more decades behind me than await me. I do not believe that I will make it to age 98 like my dad did, or even to 87 like my mother. I worry that stress from daily life, constant pain from a jaw prosthetic, grief over the loss of my dad almost four years ago, and intense anxiety caused by everything and nothing will end my life before I can even attempt to enjoy my so-called golden years.

While I do not make frequent trips to the emergency room or bombard my primary care physician with calls, I do focus too much on my health. A spasm in my stomach must be cancer; a pain from sleeping on my left arm must be a heart attack; and, a headache must be the start of a brain tumor. I did not think like this prior to turning seventy; now, this is all I think about.

I toss and turn at night, imagining how my two adult children will deal with life after I die. Neither is married; neither has a partner or a child. Will they be there for each other, or will my demise result in their leading lives of loneliness and aloneness? What will happen to the needlepoints I so painstakingly designed and made, to the Broadway T-shirts that reflect my love of theatre, to the knickknacks I treasure? Where will I be when the world dares to continue without me?

I jokingly remind myself that getting older beats the alternative. When people tell me that I don't look seventy-one, I pretend to believe their lie. But I am scared: frightened to live, afraid to die.

No amount of pretending can stop the curtain from descending on my life.

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