

A Night at the Symphony

Category: Aging

written by Jennifer Downs | February 4, 2020

The light from the stage spilled out over the audience and illuminated the faces of my companions. I was there with my Dad, 94, and his friend of many years Dilys, 93. We were settling in after intermission. As the music started, I could feel each of them sit up a little straighter, alert to the familiar Mozart. I wondered how many times each had heard this symphony. I glanced at the two of them, their faces rapt in full attention. Their eyes gleamed and each of them smiled slightly. Bliss! I felt a rush of happiness to be there with them and relaxed into the music.

The mix of players in the orchestra caught my attention. Some had grey or receding hair; others were young, one with bright red hair sticking out in all directions. The violin soloist, a young man, was slender and lithe in body. The notes sprang from his instrument as he played. We nodded in awe of him. The erect grey-haired conductor leapt with ease in time to the music.

I saw the beauty of the ebb and flow of generations, and the alchemy of musicians playing together: remaining in tune, on key and in rhythm, the music live, here and now. Each individual player is in a private world synchronized by the conductor, creating a dome of sound, timeless in the moment.

My sixty-seven years is on the young side of tonight's trio. I shake my head and smile, buoyed by the music and my company. In my work as an acupuncture practitioner, light in the eyes is revealing. When there is a spark, a glint or a twinkle, we know the spirit moves. This can be true even in someone who is ill or dying. Inner peace and engagement can be present in any circumstance of life. Without the capacity to sparkle from time to time, a person may go through the motions of life yet not feel inspired. As much as we pay attention to physical symptoms and emotional ups and downs, the enlivened spirit stands out as key to an engaged and healthy life, and a peaceful death as well.

The array of emotions shows in many ways—the eyes, the face—and reveal this ebb and flow. Though we all traverse this landscape of emotion, it is easy to get stuck in the trials of life. This makes the spark in the eyes of our elders a great inspiration. To be with them in such moments is to connect to the eternal present and appreciate the mystery of our lives.

Jennifer Downs
Baltimore, Maryland