

Accepting the Inevitable

Category: Aging

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | February 1, 2020

Simon and Garfunkel said it best: “How terribly strange to be seventy.” When I turned seventy in 2017, I felt old for the first time in my life. Nothing external changed except for a few more wrinkles and gray hairs; I kept my part-time teaching job, continued to usher at theatres, and kept up my reading marathon. However, internally, I felt mortal; most of the chapters in my life have ended, and only a few chapters and the epilogue remain.

The reality of being old challenges me. I rely upon my sense of humor to stay sane, but when my back hurts like my dad’s did and my memory wobbles like my mom’s, I do not react with laughter. Instead, fear has become my constant companion—fear of what my death will look like, of whether I will spend my final years lucid or in a fog that requires in-patient care, of how my two adult children will cope with my absence. I fear losing my independence and dignity, my ability to choose for myself. I struggle to accept the inevitably of time and to age with grace.

Ironically, the older I get, the more I turn to the past for solace and advice. Grandma appears in my daydreams; she sits in the recliner in her apartment and, as the two of us enjoy her homemade apple pie, she shares stories of her life as a widow raising a young boy—my dad. Her message to me is that age is only a number—and that I should just live each day the best I can. I talk more to Ma in death than I did in life; we were not close. Through our imaginary yet very real conversations, she reminds me to stay active until physical or emotional factors prevent me from doing so. And my beloved Dad, gone five years and three months today, forever wraps his arms around me to keep me focused on the importance of love—for my children, my friends, and the activities that fulfill me.

Of course, aging beats the alternative. Yet, when I look in the mirror, I need to encourage myself to see a vital woman who still has gifts to enrich the world—not a dinosaur who has outlived her time. I work hard to welcome each birthday as a celebration of life—not one candle closer to the inevitable.

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