

# An Editor's Invitation: Aging

Category: Aging

written by Paul Gross | February 1, 2020

It's recently come to my attention that I am aging.

I used to find it easy to ignore this particular phenomenon, but as the decades have passed, as my two daughters have now reached their mid- and late-twenties, and as my morning body becomes increasingly creaky, I find this reality staring me in the face—sometimes literally, as I look in the mirror.

The most disconcerting aspect of this aging business: the vanishing names.

There's a joke about the Florida retiree who regales his friends about the merits of one particular restaurant. "The food is terrific, everything fresh, they've got an early bird special..."

"What's the name of the restaurant?" a friend asks.

He pauses. "The name of the restaurant... The name of the restaurant..." He taps his forehead.

Finally, he says, "What's the name of that flower—you know the one that smells so sweet, but has all the thorns?"

"You mean a rose?" his friend asks.

"Yes, that's it! A rose!"

"Hey Rose," he calls out, "What's the name of that restaurant?"

I don't find this joke quite as preposterous as I used to. Once upon a time I could retrieve any name—people names, medication names—from my mental filing cabinet in a flash. Now, at critical moments the filing cabinets are locked. Either that, or my little personal brain assistant is out for coffee.

"Yes, I can give you a medication for that particular symptom," I may tell a patient, and then surreptitiously, humiliatingly, resort to a Google search for the name of a pill as familiar as—well, nearly as familiar as—Rose.

It's not just me who's aging. Friends, too. And, of course, patients.

Over a one-year period three of my elderly patients passed away. They were old, yes, and they were sick, so their passing wasn't a surprise.

And yet it didn't feel right. It shouldn't end this way. And yet it does, inevitably, obviously and sadly.

My own aging puts me in touch with that mortality in a visceral and startling way.

As he was nearing the end of his own life, the writer William Saroyan said, "Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case."

I myself used to hold the same belief about aging.

Me, get old? No, thanks. I'll pass on that one. Let's see some other choices on the menu.

Of late, I'm facing the realization that for this particular course, the menu is shockingly limited.

Does this resonate with you? Is your age making itself felt?

Do you have aging parents? An aging spouse? Aging patients?

What's that like for you?

Tell us about it in this month's *More Voices—Aging*.

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