

## Getting Old Before My Time

A few weeks ago I was having a conversation with someone I had just met who looked to be about my age, and he made a literary reference to something I was unfamiliar with. When I asked him about it, he said, “Well you probably need to be over 60 to understand that.” When I protested that I was indeed over 60, he paused and then said, “Well, you have to *look* like you’re over 60.”

That made no sense to me, but I took it as a compliment, and a testament to the value of going to the gym every day whether I feel like it or not. Not that it has been a smooth road, so to speak; I had to give up running because of my knees, golf because of my wrist and elbow, racquetball because of my lower back. Thank God for swimming, cycling, treadmills and elliptical machines.

I consider an hour or so of daily exercise the “rent” I pay on the mostly-functional body I inhabit. I’m tempted to skip a payment every now and then, but I’m afraid that my metaphorical gutters would start to sag, weeds would overtake my lawn and mortar would begin to crumble from between my bricks. Eventually the bank (a.k.a. the Grim Reaper) comes to repossess.

Someone pointed out to me that the downside of being a gym rat is that it’s all downhill from here; I’m in better physical shape right now than I’ll ever be for the rest of my life. Couch potatoes can at least console themselves with the thought that they have great untapped potential. I see a similar (if alcoholic) sentiment in a quote attributed to Frank Sinatra: “I feel sorry for people who don't drink, because when they wake up in the morning, that is the best they are going to feel all day.”

A by-product of achieving my advanced age is that I have stopped using the greeting, “How’s it going?” when meeting my peers, for fear they will actually tell me. At some point we all come to understand that our health is one of the most important factors in our waning years, but none of us want to hear about your aches and pains. Of course, *my* aches and pains are far more interesting.

Like old folks do, I was reminiscing last week with a friend about all of the technological changes we have lived through. I remember the first time I saw a fax machine work in the late 1970's – it about blew my mind. How in the world could anyone get an image to transmit over a phone line? Black Magic! And cell phones; when I was a kid and friends said they were going to the pool or to see a movie, there was no way on earth to contact them before they returned.

I passed milestone last week; I began working in the family business 40 years ago right out of college - the only full-time job I ever had. Four of my closest friends from high school also went to work in their own family businesses, but mine is the only one that hasn't succumbed to a vastly changed economy. I've always wondered what would have happened to me if I had been forced to find a "real" job.

I actually turn 62 this week (triggering my current bout of angst about aging) and will now be eligible to file for Social Security if I so choose. I'm not going to, but I find it distressing that I will now have that option. I also find it distressing that everybody agrees that Social Security and Medicare will start to run out of money by around 2034 and 2030 (respectively) if nothing changes, and the baffleheads we are pleased to call Members of Congress can't see their way clear to do anything about it.

Not that I'm worried; I may be dead by then. Or maybe not, if I keep going to the gym.

*Writers Group member Dave Parsons is rapidly aging, often at the business he co-owns on the Coralville Strip.*