

Growing Old Gracefully

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In my experience, one usually hears advice when its application would be least appreciated and mostly useless. Thus we come to know the truth in the saying that, "Nothing goes so unheeded as unsolicited advice," and yet here I go.

My Mother was not just wise; she was given to me as an Angel from God. Please accept that I am not being flippant or a smart aleck at the moment; fact is, Mom's analytical skills relative to her children were so astonishingly accurate it was, well, scary. Like when she told me at age 10 that my penchant for being reckless was going to hinder my life if not reformed. Her words have come back to haunt me many times since.

One can certainly make a case that wanting to join the Marines at age 19 because they said they needed "A few good men," was motivated by all the right stuff. Then again, my sisters would tell you even today that such a decision during the Vietnam War falls into the reckless x 10 category. Who knew my sisters would also get the analytical gene...nah, just kidding, those two knuckleheads don't know anything.

I used to work at a liquor store during the holidays while a young teacher, because when you sign your first teacher contract for the princely amount of \$6700/year, you must supplement your income in some way. One day two Senior citizens approached the cash register each with a basket full of booze. Trying to make the transaction go faster I inquired, "Are you two together?" Without a moment's hesitation the woman replied, "24 hours a day." That was early evidence to me that growing old gracefully is indeed one of life's greatest challenges.

If you don't already know how you really feel about your spouse, retirement will surely provide the answer. When that issue came upon me, suffice to say having the good sense to marry my wife was reinforced every day... "24 hours a day."

On some level our moving to the South was driven by my understanding that to live where manners are still practiced might improve my personality. Here is how a conversation went with a dyed-in-the-wool Southern Belle not long after arriving in South Carolina. She: "tell me about yourself, David." Me: "Well, I have a rough exterior, but in my defense anyone who volunteered to go to war, spent 20 years in Alaska and is a Yankee to boot is bound to have a rough edge." She: "Well, those first two are alright, but that last one..." Thus was I introduced to that most precious and decidedly Southern charm, the ability to rock your world with a smile for a chaser.

Americans do not yet value seniors for their collective wisdom, and they should. How does that go, "The years teach much the days never know." But as the demographics add to our numbers I am still confident the grey hairs will rule again.

One of the better things about growing old is that we can get away with most anything in a public setting. The other day in the grocery store I was standing in front of a display which promoted 10 cans of green beans for only 10 dollars. I stood there deciding how many cans to buy because one never passes up a deal when one becomes a senior. It also occurred to me I was gonna catch the

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with my spouse when I got home because she hates canned green beans. So it was not surprising when I started to laugh, enjoying my own thoughts. A kindly woman, also a senior, walked up to me and inquired, "Are you alright?" Of course I am alright, but I decided to demonstrate how those Southern graces are, in fact, rubbing off on me by playing along. So I answered, "Oh yes, I am fine, thank you, just thinking about how much hell is waiting for me at home when I arrive with all these beans that my wife hates." At that, she began laughing as well...so there we stood two perfectly OK seniors enjoying our own sense of humor in full view of various others who were clueless. No worries they must have thought, it's just two seniors...indeed, and it was.

If you are not yet a senior, take heart. You can memorize the sign my Dad had in his office for decades, "Never regret growing old, it's a privilege denied to many."

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