

Sermon August 13, 2017
Spirituality of Aging

References

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Laura Carstensen: Older people are happier

https://www.ted.com/talks/laura_carstensen_older_people_are_happier

New York Times

[She's 98. He's 94. They Met at the Gym. August 11, 2017](#)

THE SPIRITUALITY OF AGING, Marilyn Reynolds

Over the past twenty-plus years, I've moved from the young-old category, through the "middle-old" years, to join the fast growing group of the "old old." The next category designated by many of the experts is "inevitable decrepitude." Yikes! Well . . . and then there's death.

As old-oldsters go, I'm one of the healthy ones.

Even so, I bruise easily, have experienced nasty bouts of sciatica that put a damper on easy mobility. My aged eyes do not adapt well to night driving and the moles on my back and neck are apparently at the peak of their reproductive capacity. Even with hearing aids I sometimes miss crucial parts of a lively conversation. I hate that.

I'm no longer the go-to person in times of trouble.

I suspect it's become more like, "let's not worry Mom."

Mine is no longer the central gathering place for family holidays.

That's as it should be. Really, I'd just as soon not ever cook another turkey, or layer another lasagne for 14. But I see how easy it could be to drift to the fringes of life.

I'm aware that, although I'm important to a number of people, I am no longer *the* most important person in the world to anyone. I miss that.

I've lost a degree of faith in my competence. A few months back, on a less familiar route to the airport than the one I usually travel, I let my GPS bully me into taking a freeway exit that I knew would take me in the wrong direction. I knew in my gut that the GPS directions were wrong, but lacking the confidence of old, I followed them anyway. And memory? Billy Collins channels my own experience in his poem "Forgetfulness:"

The name of the author is the first to go followed obediently by the title, the plot, the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel

which suddenly becomes one you have never read, never even heard of, as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain, to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Yet, given all of this, the challenges of being old-old, the inevitability of increasing decay, and the certainty of death just around some too-close corner, this is a happy time for me.

I have a trail of mistakes tagging along behind me, but there's also a more heavily trafficked trail of good work, and of things done right. I realize that throughout my life I've done the best I could, given my insights of the time.

At this stage of life, with the children all raised and the responsibilities of full-time teaching behind me, I have the luxury of time to reflect, read, write, relax with friends and family. I no longer struggle for self-improvement. Like my old role model, Popeye the Sailor Man, I understand that I yam what I yam and that's all what I yam. I am at peace with that.

The Internet offers an abundance of advice on healthy aging, some detailed and complex, some simple and straightforward. The ten steps to healthy aging made sense to me when I read them, but I've chosen four pillars of healthy aging over the ten step plan, because I can remember four. They are: nutrition, exercise, purpose and connection. Between Raley's and Whole Foods, Sellands and In

and Out Burger, I have access to plenty of food choices. I live in a neighborhood that offers plenty of opportunity for safe, pleasant walking. I belong to a gym and even, sometimes, go there.

I find a sense of purpose through teaching stints with at-risk teens, and through a writing life.

As for connection, I am grateful for this UUSS community. I'm fortunate to have a large, loving, extended family, and lucky to have a number of close friendships. These connections bring me joy and are crucial to my well-being.

But there's also a sense of connection that reaches far beyond my immediate circle—a sense that though I'm smaller than a speck of dust in this vast universe, I am nevertheless a part of it all.

I like life and hope that I've got several good years left, but whether it's years, or months, or days, I trust that the universe is well-ordered and benign, and that whatever does or does not come after this life is nothing to fear.