

Perspectives

Thoughts on aging

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On January 1, 2005, I celebrated my ninety-first birthday. Friends and others several decades my junior are surprised that I am very active. I am not in a wheelchair. I use neither a walker nor a cane. My daily routine is flexible, but I am constantly on the move for at least two to four hours every day. Each day brings pleasure, satisfaction, and contentment that brighten the hours.

Yes, the pace is slower than it was when I was a surgeon, but I'm never bored. My brain works constantly until night, when the darkness blends with slumber and stills the cares of day. Peaceful rest prepares my body and spirit for the next joyous day. Each day should be accepted as a prelude to tomorrow, with the best yet to come.

I have learned that for peace of mind and happiness it is better to be morally right than politically correct. This knowledge is quieting to the conscience and sedation for the nervous system.

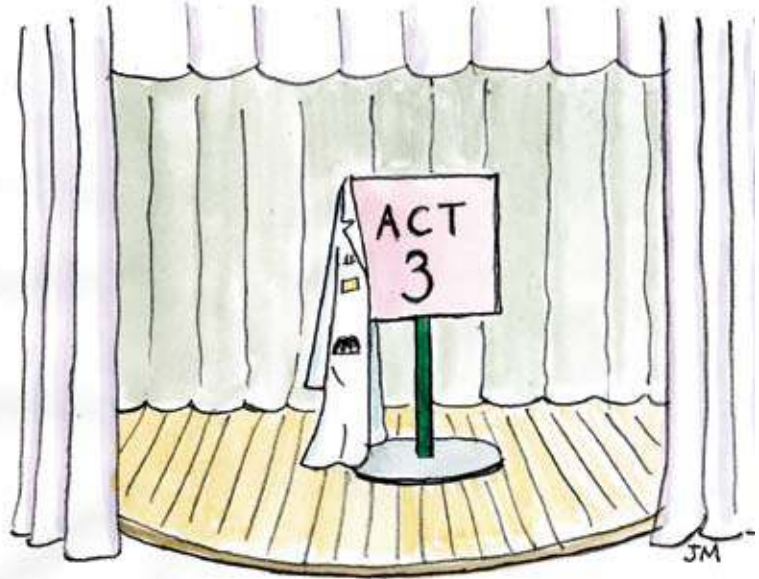
There is a time for everything to begin and end. The practice of a much loved profession must end, but retirement should not mean inactivity while waiting for the hearse. Rather it is a time to do what has been delayed, not to become dissociated from society.

Retirement is the third act of life's drama. The mind must stay alert and never dim. New ideas keep the aging brain lubricated to function clearly, easily, and without friction. Conversation with young people also oils the mind. Graduate students are a serious group of visitors. Those who have acquired their degrees and are embarking on a career sometimes seek guidance. On such occasions, it is heartwarming to observe their intensity, motivation, and premonitions.

Crossing the threshold into retirement is an opportunity to be grateful for reaching that age. At 91 years, to live from day to day, feeling the thrill of life with every breath, is a rebirth. To continue the experience requires attention to nutrition. Adherence to basic, commonsense standards while avoiding harmful foods is a requisite for longevity. Moderation in everything is a sane principle. I prefer fruit juices, milk, and plain and tonic water, but I realize that others my age take in other potions.

When a person is tired, rest is an imperative need. Don't fight fatigue by using stimulants. Retiring before eleven o'clock each night gives me excellent alertness in the morning. Early in the day is my most productive period for creative writing, while reading is relaxing in the afternoon. A daily nap is satisfying, but not always a requisite.

Decades of adult experiences have sustained me, teaching



me the ways to have a satisfying life. Some are:

1. Misconceptions can produce animosity, misery, and personal sorrow.
2. Perception is not reality—it can be deception in disguise.
3. Differences of opinion should not be adversarial encounters; learn from each one.
4. Disagreement does not mean disrespect.
5. Something can always be learned from intelligent persons.
6. No humble, ethical person is ashamed to admit an error, mistake, or wrongdoing.
7. To apologize is neither humiliating nor a diminution in self esteem.
8. Compromise can solve differences, curtail anger, and preserve friendships.
9. Temperance can help one to avoid embarrassment, hostility, ill-will, and other unwanted demerits.
10. Success is not an automatic acquisition. It can be elusive even when strenuously pursued.
11. Disappointments are to be expected.
12. Futility is the victor when excessive angst is given to incidents beyond control.
13. Try to avoid falling into the same pitfall twice.
14. Wisdom is acquired with age.
15. Don't take the path of least resistance if honesty is threatened, justice is imperiled, ethics destroyed, or moral principles dismantled.

These recommendations have contributed to my longevity and tranquility. Never abandon the spirited fire of spontaneous, determined inspiration that sparks dreams into majestic conclusions, marvelous deeds, and spectacular endings.

I shall write again, an update, when I reach 100 years.

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