

Turning 60

by

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Every 8 seconds, someone in the United States turns 60. On September 25th, I will be taking my turn. I have no idea why I want to tell you what I am thinking and feeling, but just maybe, you are interested.

I think of 60 as entering my last “trimester” of life, not that I plan to or expect to reach 90, I feel it is a new phase of my development. Most of my life is behind me. None of our lives are the same, but there are similarities. You may find some of my observations about life as I enter the sixties comparable to some of your own.

I never thought about getting old. What I did worry about is that I will have to work when I am old. When I was younger, I often asked elderly folk (or people I perceived as elderly) in the workplace, “Do you work because you want to or because you have to?” Those are two very different reasons. My prayer would be that people over 60 do it because they want to, not because they have to. America should have such a system.

When I was young, it would bother me to see people reach an age for retiring and then they would get sick or die. They worked hard all of their lives, and when they have the opportunity to kick back, they never had the chance. I think the lesson there is to have fun (as much as possible) along the way. Don’t wait to be happy, to play, or to do the things you really want to do.

Have you heard it said that “the 60’s” are the new “40’s”? I think that means that because we are living longer, we are engaged in life the way a 40-year olds used to be a generation or two ago. It is a nice thought, and helps me to feel younger. I don’t know how true it is, because a 40 year-old body and mind isn’t that of a 60-year old, generally speaking.

Now that I’m almost 60, I think of things I never thought much about before. I think about my financial future. I realize I never really planned for getting old. I just worked throughout my life. Now, I’m thinking about it. I’m thinking about how little I will have from Social Security. I’m wondering about paying off my loans, whether I’ll be able to repair my car when it has a problem, or afford a newer model.

One thing I have finally learned, and it took too long to learn, is don’t lend money to people unless you can afford to never see it again. I never had much money to offer others, but my credit was good, and I made the

mistake of loaning people my good credit. Don't do it. "Neither a lender nor a borrower be." Good advice. (Not originally mine.)

I have expenses now I never gave thought to, like the cost of keeping my hair colored. Nothing is wrong with gray or white or the blended look I have from being a red head, but it seems to bother others that I look older when I let the color go. At least I'm not into spending a lot on cosmetics or cosmetic surgeries. (Not that I could afford it.) Because employers have made a concerted effort to get rid of health benefits, and reduce full-time employment, I am paying a huge chunk of money monthly for insurance.

I think about death. I rarely did before. I did think about loved ones dying, and worried for them, but I didn't think about my death. Now, I actually imagine it. I don't dwell over it, but because I've been with the dying, I'm wondering what my death will be like. I imagine I will die in my home. Only time will tell. I don't think I will be alone. But, we know now, that many people are.

I reflect more than I daydream. I spent a lot of energy when I was young thinking about the future. I had a whole lot of ambition, but after 60 years, ambition seems to have waned quite a bit. I have very few regrets. I tried to stay as productive as possible, but now that I'm older, I don't feel all that productive. Thank God I can still mow a lawn!

I think I spend a whole lot more time in prayer. I seem to always have someone or something to pray for. I pray for our nation. I worry for our future. I pray for my family and their families. I pray for friends and even strangers. It is more difficult for me to visit nursing homes now. I am so much more aware of suffering. The secret is not to let the suffering of others keep you from being healthy yourself. Compassion is a good thing. It means "to suffer with", but "not for."

Speaking of being healthy, I pretty much have taken it for granted. Now, I tend to thank God every day for it. I really think about what I eat. I am constantly admonishing myself about exercise. (Too bad I'm not as conscientious about doing it!) I doubt if there is anything better for me to do than to walk, to move, to get it into gear. (And I don't mean my car.) A good friend invites and persuades me to exercise with them.

My body is no longer what it used to be. Heck, before I get down on the floor, I have to make a plan. And getting back up is also done with forethought. I love watching the children, popping up and down and climbing in ways I no longer even consider. Before, I would climb on the roof of the house, and scale ladders, but now I leave that to others. I find that I use a railing more often. I'm just more cautious.

I don't like to be rushed. I can remember getting out of bed and being ready for work in fifteen minutes. Now, I give myself an hour, if possible. I never bother with making my bed, unless I know there is going to be company coming. I leave for destinations early so that I don't have to rush on the road.

Other things have changed, too. About five years ago, I started plucking my chin. Thank God, my hair is light colored, but still, I have to check for the inevitable whiskers. I've noticed the first of my "aging skin" blemishes. I no longer sing soprano. Heck, I can't even sing alto, or much at all anymore. Mostly now, I listen to others sing in church.

Speaking of church, I attend, but I'm not going to freak out or think I'm hell bound if I miss. Mostly I go because I have a need to pray for others and to give God thanks for the many blessings I do have.

One thing that has definitely changed is my memory. Now I have to search for words. So often, the first or second choice isn't the one I really wanted. People will reminisce about things I don't recall at all. (And I was actually there at the time.) I double check to see if I locked the door, second-guess if I turned off the light or not, and write myself more reminders.

My "nervous system" isn't the same either. When something breaks, or when I get bad news, it bothers me more than it did before. The world seems scarier and the news on television and in the paper seems to affect me more. There's too much bad news and not enough good news. Then, there are those who are in their 70's that I talk to, and they say they just loved their 60's! I saw where someone wrote a book called, Getting Old isn't for the Faint of Heart. Sounds like a good read.

I enjoy being alone. Maybe because I've become more reflective with age, and maybe because living with some people can be hard work! I still haven't fulfilled all of my life ambitions, but I've probably accomplished most of them. Now I'm pretty much just living. I'm taking days as they come. I wish I had more goals. I haven't thought much about being 70 or 80. It's still strange to imagine myself as getting old. When I was 20, 30, 40 and 50, I didn't think much about being that either. I just did it.

(And then again, all this talk I am hearing about the year "2012", more specifically December 21, 2012, that the world will change drastically as we know it. That is, according to the Mayan Calendar, the Chinese "Ching", Merlin the Seer, Nostradamus, Web Bot, etc. Maybe I don't need to worry a whole lot about my 70's or 80's or my social security check!)

One thing I have always tried to do is stay away from doctors. They earn money from my insurance carrier just by my walking into their office.

They like to have me come. So, to stay away from them and hospitals, I make genuine efforts to eat well, sleep enough, exercise and do what is good for me. (That includes going to the doctor for check ups or if I have a concern.) Even with our best efforts, anyone of us can succumb to plantar faceitis, (heel spurs), arthritis, bursitis, colitis, dermatitis or some other bugitis.

If at all humanly possible, after living here as many years as 60, if we can keep our sense of humor, it will all be more doable. I've never met anyone who could explain the journey, but we're here and it won't be forever, so I guess we just have to keep on trying. Grandchildren can make it all worth our while, and our children may even appreciate us sometimes. The point is, make yourself as happy as possible. It's no one else's responsibility. But imagine how nice life could be if we really went out of our way to make someone else's day memorable, pleasant and happy. Maybe they would do as much for us, and maybe not. It shouldn't really matter. What does matter is what I choose to do.

Heck, that's true of any age.

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1,700 words.

About the Author: Dr. Tavenner is the author of Nun of This and Nun of That, Book One and Book Two; A Portrait of Helen Steiner Rice; France, 1996; Peru, 2002; and Memories of Mom: They Called her Dutch. Soon to be released is her newest book, My Friendship with St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. To know more visit her website: www.dutchink.com.