

Baby Boomer Raging Against Old Age: Enormous Appetite for Life



By Frosty Wooldridge

Last week, I stepped into my 74th birthday, same day as Paul Newman's. My wife Sandi and I took a hike at 9,000 feet in a dazzling snowstorm on Genesee Mountain near our house. Snow blanketed everything with a magical white blanket. We ate a quiet dinner by our fireplace that ended with a cupcake with a candle poked into the top of it...to make it easier to blow out and make a simple wish. "Please God, grant us good health in the coming years and health to all our friends and family."

As it is, I pray each day for world peace, health for everyone, tranquility for America, and I wish every human being the very best in his or her own journey. After these 74 years of world travel, I know every human being tries to live as decently as possible. For the ugly humans in the world, I wish them commensurate Karma.

Because of a life lived with extensive adventures, I never suffered a mid-life crisis. Every time I hit 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, and 70th year birthdays, I was traveling in some far-off land such as Antarctica or cycling across the Outback or standing on the Wall of China. Each decade brought astounding moments whether scuba diving off the Galapagos Islands or the Great Barrier Reef or riding my bicycle across some continent or around it.

During those years, I became a teacher, United Van Lines truck

driver, magazine-writer-photographer, dance teacher, bartender, cardiac catheterization medical tech, safety director, personal trainer, ski instructor, heavy equipment trainer, house painter and roofer. I raced in 81 triathlons. Ski bummed. Backpacked into big wilderness regions of Alaska, South America and the Himalayas. How about 15 bicycle adventures coast to coast across America? That bicycle trip from Nord Kapp, Norway to Athens, Greece stands tall in my memory. All those jobs and adventures created 15 published books, and more to come. Yes, I know delicate work and mostly, I know hard work. In the end, it was that brutally hard labor of moving furniture for United Van Lines at 90 to 100 hours per week that launched me toward my world travels. And you know what, I am thankful for that opportunity.

With those last five decades, it's been a blast, but now, I'm tripping into the vicinity of being an old man. It's an age where nothing works, and everything hurts. Darnedest feeling to cut loose from the powers of youth where I enjoyed boundless energy, a spirited body and the next high adventure somewhere on this planet!

(This is my Memory Shelf of 55 years of adventures across six continents. Pictures and trinkets collected along the way. Water collected from the snows of Antarctica. Indian vases. Chinese dolls. Japanese cup. Argentine bolo balls. Bicycling in the Amazon Rainforest. Pacific-Atlantic water bottles from bike trips across the USA coast to coast. Statue from Greece. Sandi and Frosty sailing. Backpacking the Grand Canyon. Boomerang from Australia. Shell from Galapagos Islands. Needles in a packet from 2,500 year old redwood. Bamboo walking stick from Nepal Trekking. Leaning Tower of Pizza. Bicycling by the Coliseum in Rome. Standing on the Parthenon, Greece.) Photography by Frosty Wooldridge

Jack London said it best, "I would rather be ashes than dust! I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot. I would rather be

a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The function of man/woman is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days trying to prolong them. I shall use my time."

That quote is pegged to my corkboard and I read it every day to infuse my being with its energy. Several others inspire me, too. I read them often to keep my mind right. Poet Jack Gilbert said, we all face "the ruthless furnace of this world." You can either navigate the generated heat or you can allow yourself to be cooked. I chose to work hard, play hard, honor all life and maintain optimal integrity in the "ruthless furnace of this world." So far, so good.

On the sobering side of old age, from my high school graduating class in 1965, over 40 have died for various reasons: Vietnam War in the 60's, heart attacks, cancer, diabetes, suicides, drug prescription reactions, car accidents and other reasons. Our class president Billy Canon and his wife Jill died in their 60's. The Student Council president Judy died of ovarian cancer in her 40's. Our top basketball athlete Scott McClennan died of lung cancer in his 50's. How is it that they died so young and the rest of us keep living? Where's the fairness? Answer: in this life, there is no fairness. Mostly, it's the luck of the draw. You can be here today and gone tomorrow...in a blink!

As I look back on my life, I am thankful I didn't get killed, maimed, Agent Oranged or napalmed in the Vietnam War. The most thankful day of my life remains my honorable discharge date out of the U.S. Army on June 13, 1971. I had seen so much death and mutilated bodies...it was constant depression for me. When I visit the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington DC, I rub my hands over the names of four of my old friends and weep uncontrollably. They never got to enjoy school, romance, wife, kids, family or fishing on the lake. Their lives were cut short by politicians, the Military Industrial Complex, liars and bankers. May LBJ, Nixon and Westmoreland rot in

hell.

Of course, I married right out of college to a fabulous lady who possessed a totally different lifestyle than me. So, after three quick years of mutual frustration for both of us, we shook hands and pursued our chosen lives. She loved elegant hotels and clothes. I loved tents, sleeping bags and campfires. Thankfully, we avoided children, so we went our own ways without burdens. I am happy to say that she lived a highly creative life as a successful artist and art teacher at a college. She finally married the perfect guy for her lifestyle. I am thankful because everyone deserves to live a happy life.

Late in life, I met and married Sandi, who loves to camp, dance, ski and laugh. A-men! So, as I contemplate this coming year, I'm hoping humanity solves the Covid pandemic. I hope we humans get serious about "catastrophic climate destabilization" i.e., climate change. I'm looking forward to bicycling the Lewis & Clark Trail from St. Louis, Missouri to Astoria, Oregon some 4,100 miles. Sandi will ride with me along with a few friends. As long as I can pedal, I can enjoy great adventures on my bicycle.

And what about you at whatever your age? I hope you're having a blast. This life offers incredible opportunities for those of us living in free societies. I hoping you have discovered your dream, are chasing your dream, have caught your dream, and living your dream.

Captain Jean Luc Picard of the Starship Enterprise said, "Someone once told me that "time" stalks us all our lives. I'd rather believe that "time" is a companion that goes with us on a journey. It reminds us to cherish each moment, because it will never come again. What we leave behind is not as important as how we have lived."

Thank you for sharing this birthday reminisce. May all your

birthdays be joyful, with loving family and abundant with health. Hopefully, everything works and nothing hurts!

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E-Mail Frosty: frostyw@juno.com