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Age is Nothing But a Number

By **Rebekah McCloud**
UCF Forum columnist
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I am one of 76 million children born in the United States between 1945 and 1964. I am a Baby Boomer and have reached the age when I am counted as a bona fide “senior citizen.” I received my AARP card nearly a decade ago amidst some grumbles and groans until I realized all of the discounts it afforded me.

The funny thing about growing older is that “old” is an elusive term. When I was 20, 40 was old. When I was 40, 60 was old. Now that I am almost 60, 80 is old. And why not? 80 is the new 60.

My mom is 89 (she’ll be 90 next month). She’s sharp, witty and just retired last December. She bought a truck at 80 and frequently drives the “old people” around to complete their errands. I’ve asked her a number of times how old is old. Her constant reply is: “Becky, I don’t know because I ain’t old.” My shero!

So, why all of this talk about age? It ain’t nothing but a number, right? Well, it’s more. Getting older means I’ve seen a lot. I’ve watched the world go from solving math problems using an abacus (folks under 30 probably have no idea what this is) to using a graphing calculator. I completed college statistics by punching my data onto rolls of pink tape. I thought I was “cooking with gas” when the punch card was introduced. Now students use software and PCs to do in minutes what it took me days to do.

I’ve gone from cranking my Victrola and putting the needle on the thick 78s to playing CDs and listening to Pandora. I have gone from sharing a phone with my neighbors on a “party line” to carrying a cell phone in my pocket or talking via Skype. I’ve gone from running down to the Rexall to test a blown fuse to replacing the batteries in my remote control. I used to watch the iceman place a block of ice into the icebox. Now I watch ice cubes tumble from the dispenser in the door of my refrigerator.

Back in the day, I could not wait for 1984 to see if George Orwell would be right. Who knew I'd be here in 2013, one of the stardates that James T. Kirk talked about? I used to sit on the floor in the corner of the public library reading a book. Now I cozy up and read on my Kindle.

Those were the days.

Another perk of aging is that if you keep something long enough, it's in style again. Plaids, paisleys and platform shoes are in. So are color block dresses and pleated skirts. I have some of those "vintage" items in my closet (of course in multiple sizes). Gym suits are in again, albeit the new spandex shorts and tops are no match to the boxy green and blue ones girls wore 40 years ago.

People are dancing again, hand to hand and face to face. And music is music again. I can actually understand the words thanks to John Legend, Adele and other modern day crooners.

Getting old is good. I've learned to speak another language—technology. I can tweet, Skype, blog, tag, like and poke. I can use Facebook, FaceTime, LinkedIn, Punchbowl, Survey Monkey and Tumblr. I can save as a pdf and a jpeg. Boy, the more I think about it, the more I know, getting old is great.

Some of my friends and colleagues bemoan the fact that they are nearing, are at or have surpassed the age of 60. A few kick and scream against getting old. Not me. Old is not an offensive term; it is a part of who I am. My children are grown, my grandchildren flourishing and I have had a wonderful and flourishing career.

I now know what my dad meant when he would say, "If you live long enough, one day you will be old. And, if you've lived this life well, there will be no regrets. Your latter days will be greater than the first ones." Thanks, Dad, I have found this to be true.

When I was an undergraduate student, I read a poem that has stuck with me all of these years. It is titled "Warning" by Jenny Joseph. The first two lines of the poem read, "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple with a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me."

I used to think to myself, "Why would anybody do that?"

Now that I am at the age where an uncomplicated, less-fussy life suits me, I think I shall wear purple.

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