

On Being an Old Foggy

There are many ways I recognize I am getting older.

For instance, there are hair in places I never expected to see. Who would have thought one might have “five o’clock shadow” on one’s ears? And nose? And the very long, silver, bushy threads leaking from my eyebrows? Do I come from Beowulf ancestors and don’t know it?

Inexplicably, I also get giggles from young women who think something I said is cute or quaint. If I had said something like, “I love working with these good lookin’ ladies,” twenty five years ago, I would have gotten a lecture on the inequality of payment and brains are more important than looks. Now I get this “he’s so charming” look. There is still inequality of payment and brains are still more important than anything, but...well it is nice for a young lady to give me a compliment I don’t deserve.

My grandmother once told me when I was a boy, “Don’t get old, Don. It hurts.” And she was right. Now my carburetor needs attention. Hubcaps fall off. Oil changes and lube jobs need more frequent check-ups. The engine needs attention. I have more pharmaceutical products than Guadalajara Pharmacy. They could call me every so often for products they have forgotten to reorder.

But in spite of the few perks I enjoy at my age, I still feel the encroachment of old foggy-ness upon me, my age giving me the gratuitous privilege of criticizing the fact that, I am sure my grandfather said, “The world is going to the dogs.” Or, “What will they think of next?”

And probably his grandfather said the same thing or the equivalent. But...I think my grandchildren are in for a very difficult time. Recently I visited them. Charming, beautiful, good students, very active in sports. So why should I complain?

They drop clothes everywhere. They play dreadful, violent games on their television sets where killing the most people gives rewards. They expect their mother to take care of them in spite of the fact that she has a very demanding job of her own. They...get this...call her from the television room upstairs on her cell phone, complaining about some real or imaginary complaint against a sibling.

They aren't asked to get jobs. They don't have to pick up their rooms. They don't have to clean dishes. The back yard is full of junk that they aren't asked to take care of. They have so many toys and things, there is no special day, even Christmas, where one would hope the spirit of the Birth and even of commercial Santa, would have some special meaning, some expectation. Not so.

How will they understand their adult responsibilities to themselves and their relationships? Will they expect that wars are just like football, games to be watched, us against them? Will they expect their adult equivalent of their mommies, their companies, their husbands/wives, to do the basics for them?

But, my most important concern is much more basic: human values. Here I am, more or less an old guy, judging children of our time, fair or unfair. We live in a period of perilous wars and rumors of wars, but no more so than in the last century where technology was used to exterminate our own species on a scale unimaginable in the previous hundred years.

But we are different in one, very important way: We are the first species on this planet capable of exterminating all life on it without any help whatsoever from our disparate gods, those Christian, Muslim, Aztec gods, apparently at war again against each other and not for the first time.

I just want my grandchildren and their peers to feel some responsibility for their brief time here. Yes, Grandma Bennett, getting old hurts, but I hope our grandchildren might read Plato's *Republic*. Maybe read the *Acts of the Apostles*, Luke's thoughtful story of "what to do next." Maybe read the *Declaration of Independence* for hints of democracy in our own unique, and not necessarily exportable, country. Maybe play chess games instead of one that gives extra points to how many people your bandit hero can kill. Maybe pick up the back yard to help their mother for a start.