

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Elvis is Dead

I'm not sure when the saying emerged in the American lexicon of idiomatic expressions, but it obviously was after Elvis Presley passed from this earthly existence. The expression goes like this: "Elvis is dead, and I don't feel so well myself."

This phrase referencing Elvis popped into my head because I am of an age where there are way fewer years ahead of me than there are behind me. In three months I will be celebrating my 68th birthday. One of the observances I've made is that when guys are together we try to figure out the pecking order, all based on age. Because a significant number of the men I play golf with are senior to me in age I often hear remarks like, "You're only 67? You're still a puppy!" Now, I will grant you that such a comment about being a "puppy" is a bit of hyperbole, to be sure. My grandkids certainly don't think I'm as young as a puppy. Just ask them!

Another aspect of this business of growing older (which is not necessarily the same thing as growing old) is the way in which a person handles the hurdles which seem to be more daunting as we hit certain decades of life. For instance, why do I feel as though I'm still in my 20s on some days, and then on other days I feel much more like the cumulative effect of life's twists and turns have collaborated against me. I used to enjoy a good workout lifting weights in the gym. I don't go to a gym anymore, but I have a workout area in my garage with the basics for lifting weights. The siren song of the bench press beckons me, reminding me of the time when I could push some serious weight. "You still benched 300 pounds when you were only 50," I hear in my head. Then there's my favorite exercise – the Preacher Curls. This is a physical exercise that will make your biceps pop, all while curling a barbell in the position that looks a lot like someone in prayer, thus, the name Preacher Curls. But alas! I find myself devolving into the abyss of becoming sluggardly. The weights sit patiently on the rubber inter-locked mats on the garage floor, not the least bit affected by my absence.

Since golf is one of the few active sports men in middle age and beyond can still reasonably participate in, we who chase the "little white ball" are often heard lamenting a poor shot, accusing the golf gods of conniving against us. Golf, for instance, has many names, a fair number of which are not repeatable in this article. But one of my favorite names for the game of golf is, "If Only." It goes something like this: "I hit the ball really well, if only that tree hadn't been in the way." Or, "I would have parred that hole, if only I hadn't hit the ball out of bounds on my tee shot."

But the aspect of getting older that seems to be part of the "right of passage" is when we seniors naturally ask each other how we're doing. We can share with each other the innumerable ills that have been ailing us and never give it a second thought. I used to chuckle to myself quietly when I was younger, hearing older

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people talking about their maladies. I would shake my head and say to myself, "You are never going to do that, Roots!" And those, my friends, are what are called, "Famous last words."

One-upmanship is rampant among us seniors. We are quick to look for a window of opportunity where we can gain a feeling of superiority over another person. It goes something like this, which I am certainly guilty of engaging in: Joe, bragging a bit, says he has three stents in his heart, pushing his chest out for emphasis, only to have me come back with, "Oh yeah? Well I have eight stents in my heart!" This is always a winner because I haven't met anyone with nearly so many stents. Such braggadocios behavior is common when comparing our ever increasing physical shortcomings.

Something else I've realized in this runaway freight train called life is a truism which my wife's Portuguese heritage singularly identified in a colloquialism. This Portuguese saying nails it! "If you manage to live long enough, you become a child twice." Think about it! How many older people have you known who become boorish and insolent as they advance in age? They may well be petulant and demanding, causing strife and discord within the family. Here again, we may have found ourselves saying we'd never become like that. The closer we come to this age bracket, the more we temper our concerns about such childish behavior. "I sure hope I don't become like that," we might catch ourselves saying. The rest of us hope not either.

Then lastly, the final thought on this aging thing for this article is the idiomatic expression, "Growing old isn't for sissies!" or some variation on that theme. It's true. The body doesn't respond as well as it once did. Aches and pains come to life seemingly from thin air. Naps are a welcome respite. The person in the mirror looks shockingly like your grandparent. People offer to help you, and you feel mildly insulted. And the kicker in all of this is you're spending a lot of time visiting friends in the hospital, and funerals are now just a part of your life. You look around and wonder how many people will take the time to attend your funeral. Sobering!

Despite the challenges associated with aging, the good news is life as we know it is not the end. Jesus has invited us to receive new bodies which he personally will outfit for anyone who trusts in him. Jesus has also declared boldly that he has gone to heaven to prepare a place for that person who has experienced forgiveness for sin.

Just remember: all this earthly stuff is temporary, transitory. Heaven, God's home, is eternal, a forever place to live with him. "God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." To which I say, Hallelujah!