

Getting Older Community Comment: Mike Goldsby, July 18, 2013

We're all getting older, if we're lucky. I have a summertime birthday and so do a number of my friends and relatives. I know some people hate having birthdays. I figure I am lucky to get to make one more trip around the sun.

I hear people say getting old is hell. Or getting old isn't for sissies. I notice some people seem to be getting older than other people. We don't all age at the same rate, it seems. It has as much to do with your attitude as with your body.

Certainly your priorities shift the more birthdays you have. As a child, I hated to get clothes for my birthday. As a young man, I realized the more clothes I got, the longer I could put off shopping for clothes. One of my friends had her birthday recently and she was excited over her gift; A vaccination for shingles.

I recall taking my driver's license test on my 16th birthday, registering for the draft on my 18th and visiting the Vista Del Mar on my 21st. I've never been too upset by the Big Birthdays, the Big three O, the big Six O. My mid life crises have never been linked to the actual birthday.

I went to a rock concert last week in San Francisco. We saw Jethro Tull, a progressive rock group that had some success in the 60s and 70s. My wife and I saw them in 1974. Anyway, they were pretty lively for old guys. But they took a break in the middle of the show to do a Public Service Announcement urging men to schedule prostate exams and colonoscopies. They certainly knew their demographic. Ironically, one of their hits is titled "Too Old to Rock and Roll/Too Young to Die."

I took the plunge and got a hearing exam recently. I had a very positive experience with Dr Julie Kelley. I found out I have good hearing at low, middle and high frequencies, but not very good hearing between those. It was probably all of those rock concerts I went to in the 1970s. She said there is also a genetic aspect to my hearing loss and I would not yet benefit from hearing aids.

But her consult after that was fascinating. She had some very practical tips. She recommended sitting with a wall to my back in a restaurant for instance. This cuts down on background noise and slightly amplifies the sounds you want to hear.

She said my spouse may well start her sentences in those mid frequencies, so I don't start comprehending until about mid sentence. This loss of context is what prompts people to say "What?" And, she pointed out, people start to say "What?" automatically. From personal experience, I can say that gets pretty irritating for your spouse.

She said to pause and reflect on what I have just heard. Sometimes it will become clear, especially if it relates to an ongoing conversation. She said to think of a variety of ways to say "What?". For instance; "Pardon me." "Excuse me." "Can you say that again?" She said many couples yell things to each other from different rooms of the house. Or start a sentence and walk off into another room. She said couples can be more aware of those habits.

She also said you can repeat back what you thought you heard. From personal experience, that doesn't work well for me, especially if I am way off base.

Also, as people age, they pay more attention to the obituaries. One unavoidable downside to aging is the inevitable loss of friends. Kathy Steele passed away last week. She was a long time friend and a tireless supporter of Relay for Life and the American Cancer Society. She was a great lady and an example of how to handle adversity.

A couple of weeks ago, Dr. Bob Gardner died. I had the opportunity to work with him over several decades and my appreciation of his intelligence and wisdom grew steadily. He was a skilled psychiatrist who deeply cared about the individuals and families that he dealt with.

We will all have to face that, eventually. And that knowledge can help us cherish what time we are given.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment