

Community Comment  
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### On Birthdays

Yesterday was February 12. When I was a kid in school, I looked forward to getting the day off school. In those days, we celebrated Abraham Lincoln's birthday as a single day holiday. For years I thought they were celebrating my birthday because President Lincoln and I share the same birth date. As I grew to know of his historic place in our nation's history and the magnitude of his dedication and accomplishments, it's fair to say that this first peaked my lifelong interest in America's style of citizen politicians. Somehow, I always felt honored to share anything with Mr. Lincoln even though I know how random having the same birthday really is.

I've got a couple of years to go, but this birthday means 70 is looming before me. My family is not particularly long lived. My Mother lived to see 84 which is amazing since she had cancer before 50, was told she had months to live, and survived because of an experimental treatment. She was tough and lucky. She had a difficult last decade but did get to see all three of her granddaughters grown to high school and beyond.

My Father died at 52. He had a tough early life. He credited the Civilian Conservation Corps with saving his life. He was without a steady home and in and out of trouble. The CCC's sent him to a logging camp in Oregon and changed his life. He smoked from the age of nine and although he quit six years before his death, lung cancer caught up with him. He, too, had a tough last decade. Industrial noise caused him to go slowly deaf and he didn't take it well. His parents lived only into their late thirties and we don't know much about them. My Mother's mother died of brain cancer around the age of 50. My grandfather died at 73. These were our immigrants. They worked hard, made things better for their children and grandchildren but didn't take care of their health. We darkly joke in our family that they didn't die, they just needed an oil change. If you saw the way they used olive oil and ate pasta and sausage, you would understand.

So now, at 68, it feels a bit like we are pioneering new ground. My brother is 72 and is still active except physically. This surprises me because he always took care of himself. He seems fatalistic these days.

But family history is only a part of the story, Sharon's father died at 84. He was the youngest of ten children and seven or eight were at his funeral. These people lived into their nineties. One aunt of Sharon's was 106 when she passed and was still writing letters.

The point is who knows how many days we have? We know we can eat well and exercise regularly. Keep the mind active and stay involved with life.

I've had 67 great years. Sure there have been setbacks, dark days, losses, defeats and failures. But I'm a lucky one. I have a loving partner, two great kids, and three beautiful and smart grandchildren. I have great friends of all ages. I live in a special community in the most beautiful place. It is a wonderful life.

Happy birthday to the rest of you with mid-winter dates. We are all lucky to be here.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.