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The Golden Years

Old Age Is A Gift

Old age, I decided, is a gift.

I am now, probably for the first time in my life, the person I have always wanted to be. Oh, not my body! I sometimes despair over my body—the wrinkles, the baggy eyes and the sagging waist. Often, I am taken aback by that old person that lives in my mirror, but I don't agonize over those things for long.


I would never trade my amazing friends, my wonderful life, and my loving family for less gray hair or a flatter belly. As I've aged, I've become more kind to myself and less critical. I've become my own friend. I don't chide myself for eating that extra cookie, or for not making my bed, or for buying that silly cement gecko that I didn't need, but looks so avant-garde on my patio. I am entitled to some diversion of the norm, to be messy, and to splurge just a little bit. I have seen too many dear friends leave this world; before they understood the great freedom that comes with aging.

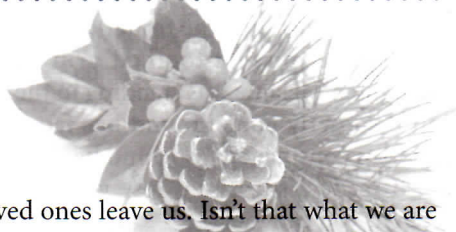
Whose business is it if I choose to read until 2:00 AM or sleep until noon? I will sing to myself those wonderful songs that echo in my mind, and if I, at the same time, wish to weep over a lost loved one, I will. I will walk the streets in an outfit that is dated and worn and perhaps several sizes too large, despite the pitying glances from

the younger set. They too, will get old. I know I am sometimes forgetful. But there again, some of life is just as well forgotten and I eventually remember the important things. Sure, over the years my heart has been broken. How can your heart not break when you lose a loved one, or when a child suffers, or even when a beloved pet gets hit by a car? But broken hearts are what give us strength and understanding and compassion. A heart never broken is pristine and sterile and will never know the joy of being imperfect.

I am so blessed to have lived long enough to have my hair turn gray and to have my youthful laughs be forever etched into deep grooves on my face. So many have never laughed and so many have died before their hair could turn silver. I can say "no" and mean it. I can say "yes" and mean it. As you get older, it is easier to be positive. You care less about what other people think. I don't question myself anymore. I've even earned the right to be wrong.

So to answer your question, I like being old. It has set me free. I am blessed to have become the person I am. I am not going to live here forever, but while I am still here, I will not waste time lamenting what could have been, or worrying about things that probably will never happen. I shall eat dessert every single day.

—Selected from the Fishwrapper 



Down on the Farm

continued from previous page

awake and wanting to come inside, tired of sleeping with a licking dog? All of them! Later, at the breakfast table, Steven told me he had to come inside so he could breathe. Every time he would peek his head out from his sleeping bag, the puppy would lick his face. I just had to smile at his story. Benji's choice of a name won, and we call him Captain. I'm being reminded about puppy stages, trash on the porch and half-chewed items in the yard. I have a full time job trying to train 5 children. When is there time to train a puppy?

We parted with Grandmother Beiler on August 25. She was bedridden all summer with cancer and was so ready to leave this world. We picture her in her heavenly home with Jesus at last and reuniting with loved ones. But death is so final and still we miss her. Heaven just seems closer,

the more our loved ones leave us. Isn't that what we are all striving for? To someday reach our Heavenly goal? This life is just a journey and it is so short! Our small minds cannot grasp the glories God has prepared for those who live for Him. How important are the choices we make each day!

Another year has swiftly passed and we anticipate the holiday season, creating memories with family and friends.

To those of you who will be having Christmas without a loved one: with the peace of Jesus in your heart, may you be carried through. Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you. I Peter 5:7

—Martha Beiler 

Reflections of Motherhood

Am I Dreaming, Mom?

We were sitting around the campfire under a clear starlit sky. As the fire crackled and the voices of family floated around me, I felt content. What is better than time spent with family under God's glorious creative sky? The children were playing a game with some of the uncles, and their laughter floated around us as a perfect backdrop to this lovely evening.

Adam, our four-year-old son, pulled his lawn chair up close beside me, at the fire. "Hi, Mom!" he chirped.

"Are you having fun?" I asked, rubbing the top of his blond head. That is typical of him. He will check up on me often when we are away, telling me what he is doing, and seeing what I am doing. Mostly, just making sure I am there.

"Yep!" he said, looking at me with his clear, blue eyes full of innocence and little boy seriousness.

"Did you see all the stars?" I asked, and together with the others around the fire we gazed at the beauty of God's heavens. The stars were bright and seemed to twinkle at us from above.

"Mom," Adam said quietly, matter-of-factly, "sometimes I think I might be dreaming. Am I dreaming, Mom?"

"No," I chuckled, "you're not dreaming. This is real and you are awake!" He giggled along with me a bit and then was soon on his way to play with the rest of his cousins.

But I knew the feeling. Sometimes it almost seems like you really are dreaming though you are wide awake. Maybe it's a circumstance or situation that happens in your life that spirals everything out of control. The feeling of grief or loss that makes you wish you really were dreaming. Hurts that are so bad, it pushes you in a dream-like state.

Sometimes it's a lovely setting. A situation that fills your heart with peace and joy so full that you wonder if maybe it is just a dream. When your surroundings seem too perfect, or you feel so blessed.

Life is like that sometimes. Our minds have a tough time grasping some of the changes that can come about so quickly. Like my little son, we may think or wish we were dreaming. The pain of life can sometimes make us feel numb and we refuse to deal with situations because it hurts too much. We forget to acknowledge that God is capable to healing and loving us like we cannot even imagine.

That led me to think of Heaven. Even the sound of the word sends my mind into a dreamy state. The dictionary says, "Heaven; the home of God, where the saved go to live after death. A state of supreme happiness and bliss."

When we think of Heaven we think of Jesus, those we love that have gone on before us, the few things that the Bible says about the glories of it, and we imagine it in a dreamlike way because we don't really actually know what it will be like.

Romans 8:18 says, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

So wherever circumstances find you in life; in a state of dreamlike peace, or facing a wave of sadness, grief, or pain, rest assured that God is in control and it is not a dream. He has a purpose and a plan for whatever we may be facing at any time in our lives.

And then, some glorious day, when we come face to face with the One who saved our souls from hell, all these earthly trials will become "as a dream." Heaven will be a reality and the trials and heartaches of life will be a distant memory. We will remain in a state of "dream-like" bliss for all of eternity, by the grace and redemption of God!

-Laura Nolt 

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,

and to present you faultless before the presence

of his glory with exceeding joy,

To the only wise God our Saviour,

BE GLORY AND MAJESTY, DOMINION AND POWER,

both now and ever. Amen"

Jude 1:24 & 25

Carl and I have been blessed to be married for 13 years. We have five children; Seth 10, Leah 9, Grace 6, Adam 4, and Anne 2. Carl does general construction full time and enjoys deer hunting to fill the freezer. We are members of Weaverland Conference and live on 25 acres of mostly woodland in the hills of Perry County, PA near the small town of Landisburg. Our children enjoy helping me with our dogs and the garden. Things I enjoy are; family time, flowers, friends, reading, writing, and a good cup of coffee, to name a few.





Growing into God

Heart Sharing

Aaron was away at a meeting, and I looked ahead to the possibility of a quiet Sunday afternoon. I was a bit lonely. What should I do? Anne, an elderly sister from church, was recovering from knee replacement surgery, and my neighbor, Mrs. Smith, had been in and out of the hospital lately with heart issues. Should I visit one of them? But when I stopped to prop up my sprained ankle, I decided that it would make sense to stay home.

I had taken a short nap, written an article and a family letter when the call came.

"Sarah." It was Anne's voice. "I'm just feelin' discouraged, and thought I'd call you. I feel so useless and selfish. All I do is take care of myself in this little house."

"I'll be right over, Anne," I reassured her. "Will that help?"

"It sure would, Honey," she answered. "I'll be looking for you."

I stopped to grab some late roses, put them into a vase, and drove out the lane. As I approached Mrs. Smith's home, I noticed that she and her little dog were out beside the road. So I stopped and put down the car window to talk.

"What?" she said, as she leaned in toward me, "I can hardly hear you." I frowned. I had known her hearing was declining, but not to this point. So I changed strategies and pulled in at the end of her lane.

"How are you, Mrs. Smith?" I asked as I stood beside her.

"Well, I can't hardly hear anymore," she said, "and the doctor doesn't know what to do. It's such a nuisance. I can hardly hear what people say anymore. He said I might have damaged something when I fell this spring. It just keeps gettin' worse with each hearing test." I looked at the tense lines on her face and nodded. Who wants to feel isolated?

Anne's face lit up when I walked in her back door.

"Well, it's so good to see you," she said. "I was just sittin' here, feelin' troubled-- and I'm glad you came."

"I always enjoy visiting with you, too, Anne," I said, as I smiled into her eyes. "You're special to me. Is there something you'd like to talk about?"

Eventually, we got around to talking about Mrs. Smith.

"You know, Anne," I said, "I think you would encourage Mrs. Smith. She would enjoy you. What would you say if I come to pick you up, and we go to visit her together one of these days?"

"Let's go right now," she said eagerly. "Now that would

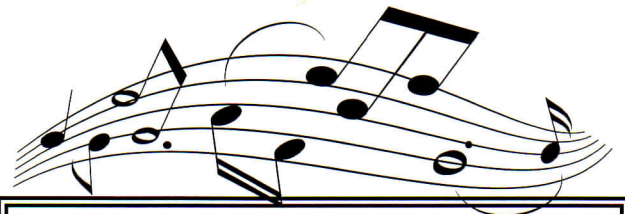
be something I could do for somebody else."

Mrs. Smith looked surprised when I showed up at her door with Anne, but she welcomed us graciously, like the southern queen that she is. She settled Anne in a comfortable chair near her own chair, and I sat near them and repeated anything Mrs. Smith missed in the conversation between us three. We laughed freely. The tense lines were gone from both faces-- and when I stopped to think about, I realized I was no longer lonely either.

My heart warmed when Mrs. Smith called me a few days later. "I got a mess of southern peas for you, if you'll come and get um. I hand shelled them myself. I really enjoyed that visit, and now it's my turn to be neighborly."

Neighborly-- that's what it was. Neighbors who reached out to one another, sharing love, affirmation, and the knowledge that we are not alone in the world. What beautiful music!

-Sarah Miller 



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Humorous Happenings

Splattered Windows

"I stayed with Esther's children while she went to town the other day," my sister shared as she sipped the last drop of coffee from her cup. "Her windows looked like they hadn't been cleaned for quite a spell, so I decided to surprise her and clean them."

"You always notice windows," I laughed, glancing guiltily at my own fly speckled, water splattered windows.

"I bet that gave her a boost to look out of sparkling windows the next time she washed dishes," I added "Nope!" my sister shook her head. "I don't think so."

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise.

"I don't think she ever noticed they were clean," my sister chuckled at my amazed look. "At least she never mentioned anything, and knowing Esther, I'm sure she would have thanked me heartily if she had noticed."

"Don't notice! How couldn't she!" I exclaimed. "If someone would wash my windows, I couldn't help but notice. They've been bothering me for weeks!" I said forcefully.

"I should have told her I cleaned them so she could have enjoyed it," my sister remarked, still chuckling.

Our time together was short, and our conversation drifted to other topics, but my amazement at not being capable of noticing clean windows lingered.

The next day my sister left. I felt lonely. My family lived thousands of miles away in a different country, so I didn't get to see anyone from home very often.

My sister softened the bitterness of her departure by hiding notes here and there throughout the house. It was fun to pull out a kettle from the cupboard, or a diaper from the changing table, and spy a cheery note fluttering out. I always wondered when or where I'd find the next one. Gradually I found fewer and fewer.

Then I didn't find a note for a whole day. Or the next. Or the next. I supposed I had found the last.

A few days later I decided to clean out the coat and shoe closet. As I grabbed up a pair of seldom used shoes, I spied, to my delight, another note! Eagerly I scanned the lines. My surprise and delight turned to bewilderment at the strange message.

"Look out the kitchen windows... and enjoy."

A sneaking suspicion suddenly swept over me as I obediently went to the kitchen window. I stared. I was amazed. She had cleaned my windows, and I hadn't noticed! SMILE!

—Leona S. 

True Faith

The youthful voices from the tape player sang out.

"True evangelical faith cannot lie sleeping *"For it clothes the naked, it comforts the sorrowful, it gives to the hungry food, and it shelters the destitute."* Mmm... This phrase of song sounds very familiar.

I can see myself kneeling among the destitute millions in India, South America, and China. In my hands are clothing bundles, food parcels, Bible story books and hope for these obviously needy souls. I see myself... "Mom I'm hungry what can I have to eat?" The vision is gone and I'm back in my American living room feeding my baby and trying to figure out what to give my hungry 4 year-old. SMILE. Guess I better start practicing "true faith" in my everyday life.

Now this song is referring to reaching out to the lost around us but I couldn't help but notice how much it applies to our mission field at home. It is based on scripture from the New Testament.

Think about it, our children do come into this world, hungry, naked, destitute and rare is the mother who can lie sleeping, through it all.


Our consciences start bothering us because maybe we aren't reaching out to the others out there that are truly hungry, destitute, and naked in an extreme way.

Just downsize our vision and we will see what an opportunity we have in our own home. The arrows that we are shaping will be able to go further and touch more people than what we are able.

So next time you see that huge pile of laundry, think of clothing your family as reaching out.

The next time a child needs comfort do it with a sense of the eternal.

"For as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me."

—Misty Nissley 



MIRACULOUS M·O·M·E·N·T·S

Message on a Clothes Pin

Big. Bad. Ugly. Scary. That's how each day of our turbulent summer looked to me when our alarm rang at 4:45 a.m. The early morning hours that Delmar and I had previously enjoyed sharing in the milking parlor overflowed with inconclusive discussions about our children's problems. I watched the house windows, hoping the three children would not waken and go to battle before we finished the chores.

Thirteen-year-old Samantha, who should have been a responsible helper, became a terror as she battled psychiatric problems. We searched for the best possible help for her and finally resorted to a behavioral health center that her psychiatrist recommended. When she returned home on different medication, we hoped for better days. But her violence and opposition increased. After several dangerous episodes, she needed to be hospitalized again. Stress mounted as the hospital stay neared its end. No open road lay ahead.

As we searched for help, decision-making wearied my mind. Lengthy meetings gobbled up daylight hours. Garden work and canning shrieked for attention. At the end of those overwhelming days, I felt ready to collapse in despair.

During one day that tangled into ugliness, Keith's wife, Beverly, gave me a beautiful, birthday gift: a set of clothes pins on which she had neatly printed encouraging verses and sayings.

One verse kept me meditating for awhile: He hath made everything beautiful in His time. What is beautiful about fighting, screaming, hitting, and threatening? Was God promising to change our daughter into a beautiful, young lady if we prayed and toiled long enough? I considered the ending of the verse...in His time. We won't see anything beautiful for years to come, I decided.

Then God began to unveil small scenes of beauty in other areas of our lives.

Around the time school started, several bushels of pears and tomatoes demanded my attention. Corn chopping and bunker packing kept Delmer running. I couldn't call my mom, because she lived eighty miles away and was too busy helping other family members. I tackled my canning alone for one day, but the next day we were scheduled to attend a meeting to admit Samantha to Stone Bridge.

I tried to concentrate on the flicker of beauty visible in finding this residential treatment center for our daughter, but would it be successful? Desperate for help with my work, I swallowed my pride and called my grandmother. She lives only fifteen minutes away and is still quite energetic for her age. She assured me that she would be

glad to come and peel pears even though I'd be away for an hour or two. What a relief to know that someone else was on my team.

From Grandmother I learned that my cousin Lavonda had extra pumpkins. I needed some to can. Before the day was over, Lavonda called and offered to bring as many pumpkins as I wanted. And she would help me can them! I couldn't believe it!

The next morning I experienced a difficult encounter with one of our young sons. I struggled to pull my emotions together before Lavonda came. Definitely this was not a beautiful day for me! But Lavonda arrived, calm and cheerful. She showed empathy by inviting me to talk about Samantha's problems. We diced and canned five pumpkins before lunchtime. Before Lavonda left, she presented me with rolls, jelly and cookies for school lunch packing. I couldn't thank her adequately.

The odor of smoke hung around the barn one morning as we did chores. The thought of a barn fire terrified me, but we could find no evidence of fire. Later that day, my father-in-law moved some of his hay bales out of the barn. Shocked at what he found, he called us to look at them. Scorched spots testified to temperatures that could have combusted our barn. How beautiful our old barn looked compared to the ugly scene from which God had spared us!

The most beautiful miracle of all happened on a Saturday evening. Samantha was home for the weekend, so we had to arrange our chores carefully to avoid issues between children. We sent Samantha to help her married brother, Keith, with his chores. Eight-year-old Michael cheerfully aided me in the milking parlor. Seven-year-old Dalen worked with Delmer who was repairing the discbine so that he could finish mowing a field of hay at Kevin's farm. Michael and I finished the milking and clean-up as they headed to the field.

We had just returned from a quick trip to Delmer's brother's farm supply building when my cell phone rang. It was Delmer, but I couldn't pick up any words. Did I hear Dalen crying? My intuition warned me that something bad had happened. We lost connection. I promptly dialed him back.

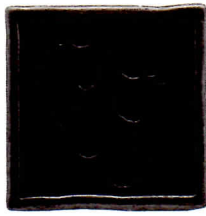
Delmer's voice shook a little. "Can you come over? We're okay, but we had a near death experience. Something shattered the glass of our tractor cab."

Michael and I were still in the truck. We raced to the hay field, trying to imagine what could have happened.

What a sight greeted us! Delmer, Dalen, and Kevin were walking around the tractor and discbine, looking as if they hadn't yet come out of shock. The back cab window was completely gone, the front window hung in dangerous splinters, and the cab was littered with glass.

"Everything suddenly exploded around us," Delmer told me. "When I looked to see if Dalen was okay, he was dumping glass out of his boots. Apparently something

continued on next page



OUR CHILDREN, OUR GEMS

TREASURES

The future comes on little feet, Stands dripping by the door;
Innocence personified, Making puddles on the floor.

The future stands with sparkling eyes,
And rosy, snow-chilled cheeks;
Plans of forts and sledding hills, Fill his coming weeks.

Our future stand before our eyes, Sweet treasures from the Lord.
Let us ever strive to lead them, To a heavenly reward.

Let us not forget to pray, For these gifts God gives to us,
Entrust them to His loving care, In Him we put our trust.

Let us pray to be examples, For our little ones to see,
That they can learn to love and serve, Our Lord eternally.
—Ruth Goebel



Gardening Gems

continued from previous page


pruning and can, therefore, be sheared into a wide range of squares, rectangles and globes! So the problem is fixed and you can have your color right by the front door, huh? Use a pair of sharp, gardening shears to thin the branches as necessary, shaping the shrub to suit your personal preferences. Remove any damaged limbs or dead wood as you go to help the plant conserve energy.

Plant the burning bush in the fall in full sun for the greatest amount of color. It can tolerate partial shade, but the lack of sunlight will affect the foliage, limiting the amount of color development and the overall growth of the plant.

Select a location with well-drained soil. The burning bush is well adapted to a variety of conditions, but it does not do well in wet conditions because the root growth pattern is near the surface of the soil. If your planting site contains heavy clay, amend the soil by adding compost, well-rotted manure or peat moss until a light and fluffy texture has been achieved.

Fertilize twice a year, once in the spring and once again in the fall.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and be thankful every day!

—Marry Alice 

Tallying My Blessings

Preschoolers, with their brilliant thinkers coming alive, can frequently supply a fresh view of life to the overtaxed brains of their elders. While going through a particular trial, when it seemed I could hardly focus on anything else, I forgot how abundantly blessed I was in spite of life's difficulties.

One day after reading a story to my three-year-old daughter that was based on those less fortunate than we, she appeared quite moved. "Mom," she exclaimed, "We have 'very lots' of things, don't we! We have"—and she glanced around the room for ideas—"toys and couches and books and a table..."

She stalled momentarily so I chimed in, "And food and clothes and a warm house and a Daddy and Mommy who love you." She nodded in wonderment and I took the opportunity to teach her the meaning of the word *blessings*. We used it in the little child's prayer they chose to say for grace almost daily, but I had never thought to explain what this particular word means. Now I could see her clearly comprehending it.

She soon ran off to play, but my thoughts the rest of the day spun around our 'very lots' of blessings. Looking around my house, which I wouldn't consider extravagant, I saw multitudes of things that were truly a blessing. Things I had taken for granted—things that make life easier.

And what's more, the tangible things in my life are only the start of innumerable blessings I take pleasure in. I have a considerate, Christian husband and three hale and hearty children. Both my husband and I are fortunate enough to claim devout parents who tirelessly endeavor to pass on a godly heritage. We enjoy strong family ties with our numerous siblings, as well as a scriptural church family. If I were to take inventory of my manifold blessings, large and small, it would take hours—if not days—to tally them up. And yet there are scores of unfortunate souls in this world who have almost nothing to their name, and not one person who truly cares about them.

The massive "trial" staring at me was shrinking in a hurry. My daughter's awe at the simple blessings I took for granted was the perfect antidote for strain and stress. When I started counting my blessings, I suddenly realized how fortunate a person I am. Life isn't perfect and it never quite will be. But I am blessed far beyond deserving and far above many. Thank you for Your many blessings, Lord!

—Rachel Schwartz 