

Aging Lifestyles: Being 70 could get old

by Joe Volz and Kate Bird

Just whether you consider turning 70 as a day to remember or a day to forget depends on your outlook.

This happily married couple looks at that big birthday through decidedly different eyes. Today, we present Kate's take on aging and next time, Joe will offer his vision.

The floor is all yours, Kate:

Next September, I will become 70. I don't want to be 70 and I certainly don't want to celebrate it.

All of a sudden, I will become the "old people" I've been writing about for so long in this column and elsewhere.

Writing about issues on aging was one thing when I was young. I enjoyed offering advice on how to be happy, though 80; how to travel, though disabled; or how to choose a nursing home.

I thought my stories might help the older generation.

My favorite song was the Beatles' "When I'm 64." My favorite line was "Will you still feed me, will you still need me, when I'm 64?"

It focused on how far away 64 was. It was just a fantasy for me. Then, I couldn't imagine it. Now it is a nightmare. I am five years past 64. It's not a song to remember anymore.

Already the reminders of old age are everywhere I turn.

In TV ads on the old folks' shows like "60 Minutes," starring two octogenarians, Mike Wallace and Andy Rooney, just count the number of products that apply to old people - Viagra and other function-restorers, blood pressure medicine, pacemakers to regulate erratic hearts, Parkinson's medicine and on and on.

Assisted-living homes and ways to assist old people in their own homes are both growth businesses. So are medical devices that give old people a way to reach cans on a tall shelf or levered doorknobs because they are easier to operate with arthritic hands.

Then there's AARP, the advocacy organization for older people. AARP and age are synonymous terms. In fact, the high command at AARP was worried about that. So the elder image was "rebranded." The official name, the American Association of Retired Persons, was shortened to just plain AARP. Hopefully, baby boomers would not catch on that there were a lot of old retired people among the 35 million members.

But, still, even with that illusive name, AARP continually reminds me of age. Its two publications, AARP Magazine and The AARP Bulletin, are filled with stories about older people. Whether they are interesting people who happen to be older or older people who happen to be interesting doesn't matter to me. They are old. Period.

Then there are the constant stories in newspapers and magazines about the boomers turning 65. That's a real bummer. As long as my kids are younger boomers in their 40s, I feel young, too. But once they reach age 65, where will that leave me?

I will be the mother of "kids" on Social Security and Medicare. So they will be old but I will be older.

There are countless specials on TV honoring some really over-the-hill geezer. The worst was the special for the late Bob Hope, who was brought on stage even though he was obviously ailing and uncommunicative beyond a wave.

It's demeaning and added nothing to Bob's wonderful years on stage, film and TV.

No wonder I feel vulnerable about age 70! Old age is nothing but a succession of losses and adjustments to failing bodies.

At 70, what do I have to look forward to?

I'll probably need a pacemaker - heart disease is in my family. My mother had terrible osteoporosis. Cancer has struck several relatives. I love walking and even that may be stolen by arthritis.

Is there an assisted living home in my future? I hope not.

I know that Joe is always preaching about the glass being half full, not half empty. So I am looking forward to his rebuttal. Maybe he can convince me that there is still a lot of kick in this old gray mare.

Stay tuned.

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