

Aging Lifestyles: The other side of 70

by Joe Volz

My wife, Kate Bird, lamented recently, "I will become 70 next September. I don't want to be 70 and I certainly don't want to celebrate it."

She worried, "At 70, what do I have to look forward to? I'll probably need a pacemaker. My mother had terrible osteoporosis. Cancer has struck several relatives."

Now that I have passed 70, let me say that I don't think I am destined for eternal paradise on this earth. I agree that serious physical ailments will catch up to me down the road as time's winged chariot comes closer; however, I have a different slant on the future and the present than Kate does.

Far from viewing life as a nightmare, I see it as a great journey. I can't think of a time when I have been happier, more content and more joyful.

I realize how far I have come on this journey through the years. And, frankly, if the sweet bird of youth came flying in my town house window in the Maryland foothills, I would acknowledge her but not embrace her.

No, I would not sell my soul to be young again.

I do remember those teenage years. They were, to put it in the argot of the young, definitely "not awesome, not totally cool."

I was terrified - well, maybe that is too dramatic a word - half the time. Girls frightened me. For one thing, they were taller than I was. The idea of asking them out on dates was scary.

Why would any bright, cheerful girl want to go out with a skinny, pimply-faced, 98-pound weakling? There were a lot of other guys, more muscular and better looking.

It wasn't until I got to college that I discovered the girls weren't as intimidating as I had thought. Also, by then I had grown up. I was much taller, much heavier and played on the college soccer team.

But, still, even in those zestful college years, there were many doubts. Would I do well in life? How could I manage my life on my own? Would I find a good job? Would I be a good husband and father? Well, I managed to deal with all those issues quite well as the years passed.

Certainly, I would never contend, even if Kate would let me, that life now is absolutely rosy. Now, I worry about Medicare and Social Security. Will they handle all my financial needs? But I have saved and invested wisely.

The important thing - and the big difference from how I viewed life a half a century ago - is that now I have some idea of who I am. Not all of the answers, but my life is in perspective. As a teenager, my fears were unreasonably amplified while I muted my strengths.

And there is something else. As you know, if you have lived any length of time, difficulties arise over the years - health problems, family problems and job problems. But if you are like many survivors, you have amazed yourself with your ability to deal with even the most traumatic of difficulties.

I have had my share. My son became a drug addict for a number of years. My first wife, suffering from depression, killed herself.

The reason I mention them is not to ask for your sympathy but to say that I dealt with these things. Sure, they hurt; however, those agonies made me stronger.

Today, I have a wonderful wife, a nice job and a basically stress-free life. In fact, I am worried that I do not have enough stress in my life: Experts say we all need a little stress.

What will the future bring?

Who knows?

But, my dear Kate, I know that we will deal with it together for as many years as we have left. I do hope that when we look back we will say, "What a wonderful life."

