

Generational Perspectives

What do a 24, 54 and 74 old all have in common? They all think they are 24 years of age, at least in their mind; their bodies say something different. I can commiserate with the 24-year-old because s/he has no idea what's in store for them, but I pity the 74-year-old, because s/he has failed to gain the wisdom and perspective offered up by old age.

Some people age but fail to mature. While others gain awareness, perspective, and understanding, they have the ability to discover and grasp insights offered up by the complexity of life; its ebb and flow and learn the limits of free will. They can step back to process and put into proper perspective hard-won gains and dismal failures.

What's the point of wishing for the stamina, and energy of youth at the expense of maturity? Who in their right mind wants to repeat high school?

Don't let the 74-year-old mask of stoicism fool you. It doesn't necessarily signify wisdom. With aging comes adversity, and one learns the futility of bravado in the face of adversity. Katherine Hepburn, age 74, and Jane Fonda, age 42 were brought together as actors in the film, "On Golden Pond." Jane was excited to be working with a veteran actor like Katherine, but to her dismay found Katherine to be competitive, and self-preoccupied. "She thought that I was out to win more Academy Awards than she was." When Katherine won an Oscar for 'On Golden Pond,' I called to congratulate her, and she said, "You'll never catch me now," Fonda said.

We have but one life. We can't fully appreciate the consequences of our decisions until late in life. At age 74, we know those consequences, having accumulated our share of mistakes and regrets. Exercising free will comes at a cost. We have learned that in making a decision, we must give something up!

Wisdom is acquired when one realizes that the tradeoffs imposed aren't always worth the personal sacrifices and what we seek in our innocence can sometimes turn into a curse!