

Don't Let the Calendar Make You Old

By Dennis Payton Knight

Just as the calendar inexorably passes, so too is aging inevitable, making you a like a fine wine. Or you can just get old, but that is a state of mind, not an inevitability.

Now that I am in my seventies and living in this wonderful Denver amusement park for seniors called Windsor Gardens, I have friends who fit either category. Some unfortunately are old at any age, but this essay is not about them. This is about the folks who, though they show and feel the ravages of time, will never be old.

All of us must deal with one or some or many of the nuisances that aging presents. Maybe we don't hear or see or dance as well as we once did. Maybe we don't suffer fools as well as we once did and have become plain speaking curmudgeons. We make jokes about aging, but as long as we maintain a zest for life, we are not old.

My good friend has been on this earth long enough to be my mother. She suffers from impaired vision and a maddening case of sciatica. I am privileged to take her to appointments and help her with shopping and other activities. She stays on top of the news, reads the papers faithfully, and enjoys forming and defending opinions. She watches Animal Planet because animals are so much more sensible than humans. We have engaging conversations, and she seldom lets a day go by that she doesn't add a new word to her English vocabulary, even though it is not her native tongue. Yes, she too is aging, but she is not old, and I don't expect she ever will be.

We enjoy in our Writers Group the company of two dozen members. We are in our fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties. It is likely someday we will count centenarians among us. Our life experiences are as varied as our hair colors once were. Some use hearing aids, others should. Some of us shout to be heard, some mumble. We have been around the block, as they say, and all of us are aging, but none of us are old. That is because we are, each of us, engaged in observing life, writing about life, and taking part in life itself. When I look around the room, I don't see old people; I see authors with experience.

A year ago we lost to a tragic accident, not to infirmities or old age, a treasured friend who led us with vitality in his eighties. We remember another colleague who passed away at the age of 97, not as an old man, but as a writer engaged to his very last week in documenting the journal of his life. Our friend didn't die old, but he surrendered life within days of losing his treasured independence.

So here in a nutshell is my advice if you ever plan to grow old: Don't.