

Choose to Make Growing Older the Best of Times

The Agony and Ecstasy of Aging

Posted by [Third Age](#) on February 7, 2013 11:42 AM



By Maddy Dychtwald

It's the best of times. It's the worst of times. No, I'm not talking about the French Revolution as envisioned by Charles Dickens. I'm talking about getting older.

Of course, most baby boomers like me view anything north of 75 with trepidation if not outright dread. We've been conditioned by too many sequels of "Grumpy Old Men." Our golden years? I don't think so.

The French mystic, philosopher, and priest Teilhard de Chardin talked about "the grace of diminishment." The diminishment of certain faculties is inevitable as we age. Having watched my in-laws, stepfather, and mother – as well as the parents of many friends – in various stages of decline, I have to agree with Bette Davis that old age isn't for sissies. (Yes, she was the originator of that line.) Chief among what scares me is that sense of vulnerability. Let's face it, if you live long enough, things can go awry: your health, your work, your relationships with friends and family. You stand the chance of losing control – of your balance, your bank account, your bladder. Where's the grace in that?

I think the operative word in approaching the scary subject of aging isn't necessarily "control" but "choice." As we get older, we really do get wiser. We're more discriminating; we can make better choices.

On a physical level, I honestly do feel better than I did when I was 30 or 40 because I make conscious choices about eating right, exercising regularly, and managing my stress. I know that the longer term consequences of scarfing down a big bag of Kettle

chips – oooh, that addictive salt and pepper! – just aren't worth the short-term gratification, so I limit myself to a handful before stashing the bag back in the cupboard. I love being able to take off for a hike or an impromptu bike ride with my kids, so I make sure to stay in shape.

I used to say yes to everything; now I consider whether I really want to do something before I sign up. I look before I leap – even if I'm looking through a pair of bifocals.

That choice includes how I spend my time and whom I choose to spend it with. Instead of being a spendthrift with time, I've learned to allocate this precious resource. With a heightened awareness that the clock is ticking, I'd rather invest time with people who enrich my life than waste it on those who suck energy and joy out of it.

Last but not least, knowing that I have a choice has caused a tectonic shift in my attitude. It is, after all, one thing I *can* control. Without turning into Pollyannas, my husband, Ken, and I try to focus our attention more on the positive things. Rather than drilling away like demented woodpeckers on all the rotten things that happened during the day, we try to identify one really good thing and cherish it.

Sure, the downs are unavoidable but they can make the ups seem even higher. My 90-year-old stepfather helped me realize this just this past Christmas. He and my mother were flying from California to Denver to visit his kids for the holidays when he blacked out and collapsed onto the floor of the plane. The flight had to be diverted to Durango, where he was met at the runway by an ambulance and rushed to the hospital. After a day of tests that didn't find anything, he was released. And what did he and my mother do? They rented a car and drove to Denver to get on with their vacation. They didn't skip a beat. He later said to me, "Things happen as you get older that can't be explained. If this is the worst thing that happens to me, big deal. I have a limited amount of time left and I want to enjoy it with family and friends."

I, too, want to get on with *my* life – and I want to keep on getting on with it, for as long as I can. Maybe aging doesn't have to be the worst of times; it *can* be the best of times – if we deliberately choose to make it so.

Maddy Dychtwald is a highly acclaimed author, public speaker, and co-founder of Age Wave. She has spent more than 25 years deeply involved in exploring and forecasting the profound business, lifestyle and cultural implications of population aging. As a public speaker, she has addressed business, government, and community leaders worldwide. She is the author of three books: "INFLUENCE: How Women's Rising Economic Power will Transform Our World for the Better," "Cycles: How We Will Live, Work, and Buy" and an illustrated children's book, "Gideon's Dream: A Tale of New Beginnings" (co-authored with her husband, Ken, and Dave and Grace Zaboloski.) Maddy lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with Ken and her two children.