

**LIFE ON THE SLOW TRACK**  
**Or**  
**“Aging Gracefully in the 21st Century”**

By Yukie Namba

Conversation #1: (At a social gathering with a friend, Mary, another friend from the recent past approaches you)—“Oh, Hi! It’s so good to see you. How have you been? Blah, blah, blah....” (Damn, what is her name? Can’t introduce her to Mary—what is her name!!! Mary stands by with a mock grin on her face.)

Conversation #2: “Yesterday the kids and I went to a movie. What was the name of it? I can’t recall but it was a great movie with that good looking actor who was in a movie last year about the casino heists.”

Conversation #3: “John and his wife are coming over for dinner tonight “Whats’er name” is bringing a dessert.” (...I think her name begins with an “M”).

The mystery of memory is that the farther back in my personal history that I look, it is easier to remember names and places of earlier times than to recollect what happened “yesterday”. Childhood friends and acquaintances seem to be cemented into memory while it often takes many moments to recall newer names, dates, titles and other passing data.

In reflecting on this dilemma, my analogy compares it to a pile of autumn leaves in my own back yard. The scattered leaves are raked into a pile and then added upon as later leaves fall to the ground. These leaves represent the memories of life, those raked first, on the bottom of the pile, being the earliest experiences. The pile grows larger and as autumn approaches, winds arise, gently at first, blowing away the topmost more recently added leaves. Perhaps those leaves are still nearby and must be gathered slowly time and time again to remain a part of the pile. Then, in the winter of my life, the wind gusts blow harder and the leaves at the top are strewn recklessly to and fro, often outside the confines of my backyard, becoming difficult or even impossible to gather. Still, at the bottom of the heap the first leaves remain, wet and soggy, but settled securely to the ground where they are no longer subject to the harsh winds but remain as a reminder of the beginning of life as they helped to shape my future. They become cherished memories unique only to me as they lay the foundation for reflection and change in my goals for the coming years.

Many of the leaves at the bottom of the pile that brought joy and learning experiences bring a kind of peace to my waning days. Although I often think in terms of “I should have done,” now, more often I gratefully think “I’m glad I did”. Time spent together with loved ones or others in simple conversation, holiday activities, vacations, work, raising a family, serving others, or planning for life leaves memories that soften my concerns as I move into a true mature adulthood. I have found that bringing together the important memories of my lifetime defines my character and gives reason for my existence.