

Growing Better as I grow Older Aging Gracefully in the Twenty-First Century

By: Nancy Cropper
Winner: Second Place

Growing older is not what it used to be. My grandmother dies without reaching seventy, and yet I always thought of her as old. In our scrapbook pictures she looks old. She had many trials in her life and it showed.

My mother lived to be nearly ninety-two. Though she began to slow down the last few years, at seventy and eighty she seemed young. She enjoyed study groups, attending plays and concerts, and especially her family.

I reached sixty-five this year, and yet I do not feel old at all. I look forward to enjoying new experiences as I grow older in this exciting century.

When I was in high school, my favorite poem was Tennyson's "Ulysses." In the poem, the hero of Homer's "Odyssey" has returned home after twenty years of adventure. The aging king reflects on his many experiences. In one of my favorite lines he says, "I am part of all that I have met..." I, too, realize that I am part of all that I have experienced throughout my life. Each person I have known, each place I have visited, each opportunity I have had has added to the person I am today.

The poem continues:

...yet all experience is an arch where thro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.

Ulysses chafes against his return to a life which now seems uninteresting. He thinks,

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use
As tho' to breathe were life, life piled on life
Were all too little.

Though I am content with my life as it is, I can relate to Ulysses' desire to follow new horizons as he ages. The opportunities offered in this new century make this easily possible. Within the last year I have expanded my understanding of family history research, begun twice-weekly line dance classes at the senior center near me, and seen Michelangelo's David in Italy. I look forward to expanding my experiences in the years to come.

I know if I live long enough the day will come when meeting new people and going new places will be more difficult. My mother slowed down a lot in her last few years. Still, only a few weeks before her death, her one request for Christmas was for a simple atlas so she could better understand our changing world. She continued to stay in touch by phone with old friends and to delight in her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I appreciate her example.

I am grateful to be growing old in a time when computers, easier and cheaper travel, and better recognition of the needs of seniors offer new opportunities for the taking. There are new books to read, new skills to learn, new people to meet and new places to visit. I know it is possible to grow better, not just older, as each of these becomes a part of me.