

# Aged to Perfection

by Denis Waitley

## LIVING IN THIS MOMENT, IN THE BEAT OF A HEART

In the beat of a heart, a child is born. In the beat of a heart a celebrity or unknown person faces mortality. In the beat of a heart, an Olympic speed skater wins the gold medal. In the beat of a heart, history is made by something someone did or did not say or do. In the beat of a heart our children will have grown and flown, with families of their own.

I looked in the mirror this morning and saw Rip Van Waitley, the little boy I used to be, now able to get my senior's discount at the movie theater. As I write these words, I have just returned from a family reunion to celebrate my mother's 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday, and soon I will be the eldest in our clan, the keeper of the family tree and curator of our memories.

I already suffer from "Dessert Altsheimer's". When I go to the buffet, I ask the restaurant staff? Was I just here? Did I already have the carrot cake and chocolate decadence? Or is this my first trip, as I think it is?

Many of my favorite anecdotes now center around older people. You may recall the true story concerning famous newscaster Lowell Thomas, when at the age of 87 married a 58-year-old woman and took her to Europe aboard a luxury cruise ship for their honeymoon.

My friend Art Linkletter, who went to high school with my mother, sent Lowell Thomas a cryptic telegram: "Be careful and conservative, Lowell. This trip could be fatal!" Whereupon, Lowell Thomas telegraphed back, "If she's gotta go, she's gotta go!"

A favorite fictional story I like to tell is about a forlorn older man sitting, crying, on a bench in New York's Central Park. A passerby tried to help and comfort the old man:

"How can I help you, are you homeless?"

"No," sniffled the old man, "I have a large, comfortable townhouse on E. 67<sup>th</sup> Street! "

"Well then," said the good Samaritan, "are you lonely and by yourself?"

"No," the old man shook his head. "I have a beautiful, romantic young wife waiting for me."

"Why you ungrateful, wretched mal-content, why are you sniveling there feeling sorry for yourself?" the passerby scolded.

The old man wiped a tear from his eye and replied miserably, "I can't remember where I live?"

Soon I will no longer buy green bananas, rather than worry about living long enough for them to ripen. And a meaningful discussion for me will concern what we had for lunch at the senior center.

Let's make a pledge together, You and I, to seize this moment and live it to the fullest, rather than yearn for the past or simply dream of a bright future. Let's keep the playful spirit full of curiosity and energy like a child, and live in the now, in this beat of a heart.

Of all the wisdom I have gained, the most important is the knowledge that time and health are two precious assets that we rarely recognize or appreciate until they have been depleted. As with health, time is the raw material of life. You can use it wisely, waste it or even kill it.

Each human being now living has exactly 168 hours per week. Scientists can't invent new minutes, and even the super rich can't buy more hours. Queen Elizabeth the First of England, the richest, most powerful woman on earth of her era, whispered these final words on her deathbed: "All my possessions for a moment of time!"

We worry about things we *want* to do – but can't – instead of doing the things we *can* do – but don't. How often have you said to yourself, "Where did the day go? I accomplished nothing," or "I can't even remember what I did yesterday." That time is gone, and you never get it back.

Staring at the compelling distractions on a television screen is one of the major consumers of time. You can enjoy and benefit from the very best it has to offer in about seven total hours of viewing per week. But the average person spends more than thirty hours per week in a semi-stupor, escaping from the priorities and goals he or she never gets around to setting.

The irony is that the people we are watching are having fun achieving their own goals, making money, having us look at them enjoying their careers.

Even so, time is amazingly fair and forgiving. No matter how much time you've wasted in the past, you still have an entire today. If you've just frittered away an hour procrastinating, you will still be given the next hour to start on priorities.

Time management contains one great paradox: No one has enough time, and yet everyone has all there is. Time is not the problem; the problem is separating the urgent from the important.

Every decision we make has an "opportunity cost." Every decision forfeits all other opportunities we had before we made it. We can't be two places at the same time.

In their excellent management book *Tradeoffs*, Drs. Greiff and Munter discuss the difficult options that face us in all areas of our lives. One case in point illustrates a common opportunity cost. It's a true anecdote they call, "Bicycle vs. Mother:"

"Johnny is a precocious eight-year-old boy. Both his parents work. His mother is a management consultant and travels frequently. After being away for several days, she arrived home late one night and hugged her son.

"He said, 'Mom, I missed you. Why were you away so long?'

"She smiled and replied, 'One of the reasons I was away was to make enough money to buy you the bicycle you wanted.'

"Young Johnny looked at her reflectively and stated, 'Mom, I really did want the bicycle. But mothers are more important than bicycles. So please stay home more.'"

Even though we all are aware of the tradeoffs of "quality time vs. quantity time" in our relationships, we are not used to thinking specifically about how our decisions cost us other opportunities. Without this understanding, our decisions will often be unfocused and unrelated to helping us achieve our most important goals.

Each day we will continue to encounter deadlines we must meet and "fires," not necessarily of our own making, we must put out. Endless urgent details will always beg for attention, time and energy. What we seldom realize is that the really important things in our life don't make such strict demands on us, and therefore we usually assign them a lower priority.

To live a rich, balanced life we need to be more in conscious control of our habits and lifestyles. We need a regular exercise routine. We need to practice what we preach regarding our own eating and health habits. We need to relax more through musical, cultural, artistic, outdoor and family activities.

We need sufficient sleep and rest to meet the next day renewed and invigorated. In addition to blocking periods of time for recreation and vacations, we also need to schedule large, uninterrupted periods of work on our most important projects.

Contrary to popular notions, most books, works of art, inventions, and musical compositions are created during uninterrupted time frames, not by a few lines, strokes, or notes every so often.

Every book or audio program I have written has been done with the discipline of twelve to fifteen hours per day during a specific block of time.

You see, it's the easiest thing in the world to neglect the important and give in to the urgent. One of the greatest skills you can ever develop in your life is not only to tell the two apart, but to be able to assign the correct amount of time to each.

There is no company or government agency to remind you to stay focused on doing first things first. And, our loved ones don't schedule conference calls with us that we must make.

They understand when we are preoccupied with our urgent business, but it's hard for us to understand, many years later, why they appear preoccupied when we finally find some time for them.

I have never received a call from a university begging me to improve my knowledge, nor received an e-mail from my health spa insisting that I show up and work out for thirty minutes each day.

The grocery clerks have never made me put back on the shelves the junk food I put in the cart, nor have I ever been subpoenaed by the ocean or the mountains to appear for relaxation and solitude. Yet I receive hundreds of urgent phone messages and e-mails each week from people with deadlines.

Beginning tomorrow, throughout the day, and every day thereafter, stop and ask yourself this question: "Is what I'm doing right now important to my health, well-being and mission in life, and for my loved ones?" Your affirmative answer will free you forever, from the tyranny of the urgent.

And more than any other quality except integrity, compassion, and respect, maintain a well-developed sense of humor. I love to make light of myself and how ridiculous it is to take yourself so seriously, you actually believe you're at the center of the universe.

Laughter is the greatest stress buster and smiling is the best way to have a face lift.

I did go to my fiftieth high school reunion recently. It was a big mistake. We all had oversized name tags, with capital letters, but it didn't matter, because none of us could make out the names without our reading glasses. We all had our graduation yearbook photos on our name tags. It was a big mistake.

We all saw old people who claimed to be our classmates. The cheerleaders looked like the Refrigerettes. The football players' chests had all fallen to their drawers, and they were driving Frito Lay trucks.

My high school sweetheart didn't even recognize me with my name tag. She broke out laughing and said, innocently, "how many wars were you in?" Although it's not nice to seek revenge, which is a loser's defensive reaction, I couldn't help but answer her back with a wink: "I recognized you right away. I spent a lot of time with your mother when we were young!"

She said, "That's not like you to say things like that." I said, I know: "I grew up to be the kind of boy my mother didn't want me to play with." We both laughed and hugged, and wondered where the years had flown.

It seems like only yesterday that I was jitterbugging and slow dancing at the prom listening to the big band sounds with Sinatra, Doris Day, Peggy Lee, Jo Stafford, and Louis Armstrong in the background. What had happened to the five decades in between?

Fifty years had passed, in the beat of a heart.

At my high school golden anniversary, I stood up before the aging, dwindling student body who had gathered at the La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club, as I had so many years ago and recited these words:

**"There are two days in every week about which we should not worry, two days which should be kept free from fear and apprehension.**

**One of these days is Yesterday, with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains.**

Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money in the world cannot bring back

Yesterday. We cannot undo a single act we performed; we cannot erase a single word we said. Yesterday is gone.

**The other day we should not worry about is Tomorrow, with its possible adversities, its burdens, its large promise, and poor performance.**

**Tomorrow is also beyond our immediate control. Tomorrow's sun will rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds; but it will rise. Until it does, we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is as yet unborn.**

**This leaves only one day: Today.**

**Anyone can fight the battles of just one day. It's only when you and I add the burdens of those two awful eternities, Yesterday and Tomorrow, that we break down.**

**It is not the experience of today that drives us mad, it is remorse and bitterness for something which happened Yesterday and the dread of what Tomorrow may bring. Let us therefore, live this one full Today."**

Make your decision to grab this precious moment in joy, faith and thankfulness and count your many blessings instead of your blemishes.

In the beat of a heart, this moment will be history.

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