

You've gotten old

There I was. minding my own business one afternoon as I enjoyed doing another of my DIY projects. This time, it was painting my bedroom, both ceiling and walls. I was refreshing it as a tonic to be more conducive to my sleeping regime.

My doorbell rang. Most visitors know that my backdoor is always open and they usually come to the back of my house. Armed with paint roller and painting pan, I answered the door. Outside were two priests who served with me in Mississippi. Fr. Louis, now retired from Biloxi diocese and Fr. Mike O'Brien, a classmate from the Jackson diocese.

My classmate greeted me when he saw me in my painting gear, blurted out, "Tracey, you've gotten old." Obviously, I had. The last time I had met him with eleven years ago. My hair was still black and I had traded it in for a full fledged gray. At least, I still has a full head of it while his hair follicles had taken an early retirement and reverted, instead, to plentiful patches of baldness.

His comments prompted this question. If we meet someone that we haven't seen in a long time, we are often inclined to see how much they have changed, without thinking that, we ourselves, have also changed but that realization is minimal compared to the drastic change we notice in someone else.

I wonder is it some kind of defense mechanism that we are more tuned into changes in others than in ourselves. Is it because others seem to change and get older faster than we do. And that perception might somehow delay our acceptance of our aging process.

A few weeks later, on a Thursday, I was at my favorite DIY store. I always visit there on a Thursday because Thursday is Seniors Discount day and I wish to take advantage of getting an extra 10% off any purchases. A young man, in his early thirties, was at the checkout counter. As I placed my purchases on the counter, I said, "Seniors Discount, Please!" The young man looked at me and said, "I wouldn't think you are that age." In other words, was I old enough to qualify for the seniors discount." I told him that if he need an ID as proof, I would give it to him, gladly." "No need" he assured me. So, every time, I visit that store and he is at the checkout counter, I don't have ask for the discount, he does it automatically already.

Sometimes, I meet people who, when they find out that I am retired, simply say, "You're too young to retire." I just thank them, smile and move on.

We often hear the phrase, "Aging Gracefully." How does one age gracefully in a youth obsessed society that tells us that our value declines as we age?

When I have visitors from the United States, I always bring them to see the place in our town that is the world headquarters for the production of anti-aging promises – Botox. I tell them, that if they want to enjoy the fountain of youth a little longer; just go and get a Botox injection.

Instead of becoming a "Greeter" at a WalMart, I have made lots of discoveries that otherwise I would have missed. I have dabbled in cooking and baking and haven't poisoned anyone as a result. I have been doing my part for climate change by having my own organic vegetable plot where I can nurture vegetable seeds from propagator trays to soil ready raised beds and watch them grow and produce as, later, they grace my family and neighbour's dinner tables. I have opportunities to enjoy immediate family again as well as neighbours who simply know me as "Michael." I continue to be a tour guide for friends who decide to visit me from the States as I showcase my countryside for them.

But most of all, retirement has given me an opportunity to become more reflective; to journey within more and to try and discern the day to day feedback and its implications I receive from such an adventure.

I remember the old poem, "The Shape I Am In." It begins:

There's nothing the matter with me.
I'm just as healthy as can be.
I have arthritis in both knees,
And when I talk, I talk with the wheeze.
My pulse is weak,
My blood is thin,
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in."

Yes, I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in. No thanks to Botox or a tuck here or there from a surgeon's knife but, maybe, because of the genes I wear and they are not Levi's.

Someone once said that the "tragedy of life is that we get old too soon and wise too late." I may have gotten older but I have a lot more wisdom to discover.