

## I'M DYING HERE

There are hardly any "taboo" subjects left when engaging in conversation. Sex, politics and religion used to be subjects to be avoided, but not now. These topics are discussed on talk radio, television, in books, and in conversation at bars or cocktail parties....any old place. But death, ones own mortality, that's not a topic up for discussion. This is particularly true for the aged. The old joke goes, "Why are there so many old people in church?" The answer; "They're cramming for the finals." They're old. They know there's not much time left. It's only prudent to cover all the bases.

I'm old. There's no point in arguing otherwise, my appearance alone is mute testimony to the ravages of the years. It's not just the gray hair and wrinkles. I got fitted for hearing aids the other day, and the lady recommended "senior silver" as the appropriate colour. And when you get old, everything sags. Your ear lobes sag, the tip of your nose droops, and I'd rather not go into all the private areas subject to the pernicious effects of gravity, both men and women. So at some point it becomes pretty obvious that we're not going to go skipping through life forever, though we may pretend otherwise.

But do we think about death? Discuss it? No. And with good reason. It's depressing, and there's no provable answer as to what happens once we stop breathing. Floating on a cloud while strumming a harp seems just plain silly, but no more preposterous than encountering twelve virgins who adore you. Virgins in heaven for men. What's for women? Chippendale dancers? Where do they come up with this stuff? You have to die to know the answer to the death mystery, and few people are curious enough to make that move. Besides, once you find the answer, there's no one to tell.

Many believe that you have to earn your way into heaven, whatever form "earning" takes. They envision a gatekeeper with a tablet on which is recorded all the good deeds you have done along with all the sins you have committed. Mark Twain said, "Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in." I agree. My dog Bob would elbow his way in for sure, leaving me befuddled at the pearly gates.

It is forecast that us old people will cause the raging engines of the economy to sputter and stop, just like us. Lower birth rates and longer life expectancy will put unbearable pressures on health care and on the old age pension and social security. With all us old people wandering about with varying forms of dementia, lying in hospital beds, or just consuming food and air without providing any fuel or benefit for the economy, the remaining few working folks will be burdened with onerous and unbearable taxes. Make way for the new economy, where they'll pitch us out of our igloos and tramp off to find happier hunting grounds, leaving us

oldies behind to shiver in the cold winds of practicality.

But before the grim reaper calls, many of us diligently slave away to assure that we will be remembered for riches or fame. Go to Glenwood. Look at some of the ostentatious gravestones. These people had position, and they wanted you to know it, even in death. Like it matters. Someone once said, "*Once the game is over, the king and the pawns get put back in the same box.*"

Most of us live relatively happy but unremarkable lives. No lavish gravestones or parades when we shuffle off this mortal coil. Our children will remember us, so will our friends, then the glowing memories will fade and die like a summer campfire. There's a gravestone lying flat in the Black River Chapel cemetery, most of the inscription is illegible, but barely seen is the phrase, "Always Remembered." Well, maybe not always.

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