

# Things I like about being old

Chris Conrad at age 70

I've been around for as long as I remember, and I don't remember getting started or getting old. I do remember a lot of great stuff happening, then suddenly: Wham! I'm old now. Since it's always now, and it seems like I've always been, I guess I've always been old. Oh, forget about it. But first, before I forget, I wrote down a list of some things I like about being old.

The first thing I like about being old is how long it takes to get old and how long you're old. Every 5-10 years you think, man, I'm getting old. Ten years later you think, no, that wasn't old, this is old. So old keeps getting pushed out. You turn 25, then hit 30; after 40 you start hitting the "Big O" birthdays: 50, 60, 70. And, with any luck, it doesn't stop there. We call ourselves elders because nobody wants to be just plain old, but I do. I've waited a long time for this.

Next are senior discounts and senior breakfasts! After 35 years of paying top dollar for everything you do, you hit age 55 and the discounts kick-in! But that's just a beginning.

It's fun how people act surprised when they hear your age and pretend that you still look youthful, but I've earned every one of these wrinkles. As a lifelong activist, for the first 30 years, you're the youngest activists in the room. Next 20, everybody is around your age. Now they all seem young except for a few OGs. People tell you, "You look good for your age," and whenever you do something, you get to say "hey, not bad for somebody my age." Instead of people telling you you're out of shape you, they are surprised you're still alive and act like they're glad about it. Store clerks sometimes offer to carry heavy stuff for you.

When you're old, you don't have to jump out of your seat and offer it to somebody who's 55 anymore; They're punks. You get to wear socks with your sandals to keep your feet warm and not care what people think. Whenever there's a bathroom nearby, you can always take a pee and you can go anywhere you want, as long as there's a bathroom nearby. When you fart, people pretend not to notice, and fart jokes never to get old, so you always have something to laugh about. Instead of worrying about losing your hair, you're just grateful that you have any hair left. And yet, you still get zits every once in a while, so you can still feel young.

When you feel aches and pains, it doesn't mean you strained something or hurt yourself, it's just your age showing. My favorite is having arthritis because no matter how bad you feel, you don't have to worry about taking it easy or changing your lifestyle: You're not going to damage it any worse than it is and it's going to hurt whether you're having fun or not, so go ahead and exert yourself. The more wrinkled you get, the more far-sighted you get, so when you look in the mirror you can't see your own wrinkles. That way, you can convince yourself that you're aging better than your friends, because they're farther away and you can see their wrinkles.

You get to look back at all these moments of life and realize how well we've had it. Like for example, when you could eat red meat, cream sauce, cheese, sugar and salt. We can still remember being able to drink water directly from a stream, travel Europe for \$10 per day,

stable climates, hitchhike around without having massive wildfires and floods every year, national parks where the trees were not all charred, \$20 for an ounce of weed, \$10 on a good day. We got to listen to the best bands. Of course, it's easy for me to say, since I don't know any new bands or music. You can tell people you went to Woodstock and they believe you. We get to relive the sixties TV series: Cell phones like the communicators and talking computer on Star Trek, stumbling around like Mr. Magoo, and getting bionic body parts installed like the \$6 million man. Everybody I know is getting new hips and knees. I love my lens implant.

People expect you to forget their names. You can tell the same story over and over again and people just smile and nod. If you're in a bad mood, people assume it's because you're just being crochety and brush it off. People don't expect you to understand tech – they're surprised when you do. Youngsters sometimes stop and offer to help me figure out my phone apps, even when I don't need them to. You can get out of almost any conversation by putting on a confused look, a meek smile and saying something like, "Did I ever tell you about the time I drank too much prune juice right before bedtime?" Works like a charm.

So, what did we learn? Wrap yourself in a panoramic education, both worldly and academic. Accept one's mortality and put your will, trust, organ donor card and end of life instructions in order. Take better care of your teeth than you think you should; and take better care of your loved ones than you think you should. If your partner is always mumbling and they don't tell you important things, and you each think the other never listens to you — get your hearing checked. Get both your hearing checked, in fact, and don't be any more embarrassed for using hearing aids than you would for wearing contact lenses. If your neighbors are too loud, turn off your hearing aids. Know that it's okay to admit you're wrong and make apologies even when it's not your fault. Be forgiving. Let go of petty things and plunge deeply into the profound. Don't hold grudges or try to get even with people, just outlive them.

Pare down on the hubris of life, including possessions, because you can't take it with you, nobody else wants to get stuck dealing with them and hearses don't have a trailer hitch to pull a U-haul full of stuff behind them. Of course, the real treasures are the non-material things: your breath and being; your health, relationships and experiences; your accumulation of wisdom, including the wisdom to laugh at yourself. Build up a rich history of friends, memories and relationships until, just as you're thinking, well, they can't take that away from me, you become senile and die. So keep your sense of humor, don't dwell upon what you've lost, appreciate what you've had and, when all else fails, smile and be nice.

So, the real point of life is, I guess, to experience and appreciate. The force and beauty of nature, the pleasures of music and motion, the world of travel and the power of laughter and kindness. So I close now by remembering these things I hold most dear and I feel so honored that they surround me: my wonderful and beloved wife and soulmate, Mikki, our home, family and friends, our shared history and our, etc., and still haven't run out of time.