AGING WITH CARE | The September of my years

This has been a fantastic summer for outdoor activity. I can’t remember another Seattle summer with so many “dog days” — the heat, sunshine and halcyon days.

As the weather starts to cool, days shorten and the rains return, I am feeling the metamorphosis of moving from one season into the next — more so this year than others.

As a longtime resident of the Northwest, intellectually I can say to myself, “I know what to expect with seasonal changes,” but this year, I am lamenting, more intensely, the loss of freedom that summer affords, the abundance of summer time activities and even the riches of the garden. Anyone in Seattle who gardens or has fruit trees experienced an unbelievably bountiful harvest this year.

Another seasonal effect: The atmospheric pressure changes that accompany cooler, moister weather are making my joints, low back and legs ache; they didn’t do that (at least as much) over the summer.

A thought came to me: The seasonal change and the intensity of my unwanted feelings are similar to the experience of aging. Just as we annually experience the change of seasons, over a lifetime we live through a series of seasons: being a newborn, assuming youthful exuberance, embarking on learning, developing relationships and careers, parenting and then the nebulous experience of growing old.

In the history of planet Earth, aging has never experienced a metamorphosis like it has the last 50 years. Generally, we are blessed with better health and health care; we are more active and living longer.

But this is new territory. The longevity we are experiencing should provide us wisdom, a sense of peace, forbearance and generosity. If we keep an open mind during this season of aging, the gifts of discernment and awareness may be our bountiful harvest.

The reality

We are human. So the season of aging also brings trepidation and uncertainty — much like the feelings I am experiencing this year with the loss of summer. Frailty and ill health are real fears.

Boomers are now getting hints of what aging brings about: stiff joints in the morning, hearing and eyesight that is not crisp and clear and energy that is more difficult to muster. Approaching this new season of living, we may sense apprehension and unease. But this is not where our focus should be.
In aging, we must remind ourselves there is beauty. We’re not there yet, but the season of fall brings the most beautiful colors of the year. So, too, with aging.

I know I am being idyllic, but with good fortune, our fate or destiny may be to live long lives. Our challenge: to prosper as we age. To do this, it is essential to engage in new activities, enjoy new experiences and new friendships. September is a great month to enroll in classes at our community colleges or register for an art class, dance lessons or an exercise program at one of our community centers.

By focusing on community, relationship, friends and family, aging seniors will find their bountiful harvest.

Support in aging

As we age, various factors can deter our ability to stay connected with our close-knit communities – among these: retirement, mobility issues or an inability to drive.

In looking after aging parents and family members, it is our duty to act as caretakers (gardeners, if you like). For the well-being and health of aging loved ones, do everything you can to facilitate ongoing, loving family/friend relationships.

In aging, we will come upon hurdles. But with a strong community of family and friends, this golden season will bear a harvest of abundant fruit and fine wines.

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