



# *The Beauty of Aging (Gracefully or Not)*

By Vaidehi

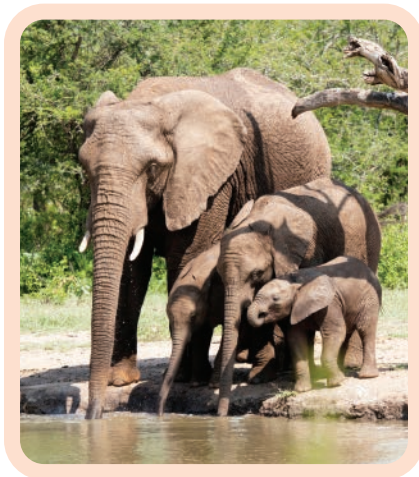
*“Mrs. Miniver suddenly understood why she was enjoying the forties so much better than she had enjoyed the thirties: it was the difference between August and October, between the heaviness of late summer and the sparkle of early autumn, between the ending of an old phase and the beginning of a fresh one.”*

~Jan Struther,  
Mrs. Miniver

IN A SOCIETY THAT VALUES YOUTH TO THE POINT OF INSANITY,  
REACHING THAT TERRIBLE “MIDDLE AGE” SEEMS LIKE  
A TICKET TO THE CIRCUS OF FORGET-ME LAND!

**As I journal and reflect my way through all this, I wonder why this is a big deal at all. In fact, in many families across nature, growing older is a good sign. It's a symbol of status and respect.**

Take the example of the silverback gorilla: all that gray hair on their back gives them the authority to make decisions for the group! Wolf leaders, elephant mothers, and older dolphins are all instances where nature favours age.



Why then, are humans obsessed with youth? From creams that remove wrinkles to references like “well-maintained” (as if we were a car!), we are told repeatedly that being younger is somehow better.

Personally, growing older has taught me a few things, and I wish I could go back in time and share them with my younger self. However, that's not possible unless we invent a time machine, so I'll list them here and you can take what you will.

***Don't obsess over beauty. Or rather, what society tells you beauty is.***

All through my growing up years, I pursued being beautiful even at the cost of my true talents. I underplayed my reading habit, and I acted meek so men would perceive me as “more beautiful.” I have no idea where I received these ideas, but they were debilitating.

I wanted to be beautiful so I would be chosen by men, but I never stopped to ask myself: Which man?

It is sad that I desperately wanted to be chosen by someone even as I rejected myself, day in and out. After severe blows to my self-esteem, I realized that the pursuit of beauty has been absolutely useless.

What really helped me during difficult times was my sheer bull-headedness and foolish optimism. Surprisingly, being myself, with gray hair, crooked teeth, and a few extra pounds, is easy to do and has also earned me some beautiful friendships, with men and women alike.



***Secondly, age is really just a number.***

My dog doesn't know how old she is, so she is free to act as she pleases. She jumps on beds, goes crazy over sweets, and gets jealous. She runs if she wants, and as much as her body allows. It's easy for her to do all this and more because she doesn't have that limiting belief called “age.”

Ellen Langer, a Harvard psychologist, conducted an unusual experiment where elderly subjects were asked to live like it was twenty years earlier, in a simulated environment. The men who underwent the experiment supposedly showed improvement in memory, cognition, and much more.



Even if the experiment seems outlandish to you, there's an important takeaway: How you perceive your age makes a huge difference in how you approach it. So why not approach it with positivity?

A few months ago, I read a very powerful quote, and it made a huge impression on me: "Do not regret growing older; it's a privilege denied to many."

How true! My mind immediately goes to my own father, who passed away before he fulfilled many of his dreams. I am sure he would have welcomed many more years with open arms, warts and all.

For a patient with a terminal illness, each day growing older can only be a blessing, even when the body feels frail. We don't have to wait for something like this to feel grateful for our age. We have that opportunity each day and in each moment.

*You don't have to 'maintain' yourself.*

*You don't have to look younger.*

*You can be thin, overweight, or anything in between or beyond.*

*Don't hold yourself back from things you love just because you feel older.*

Don't feel the pressure to age gracefully or anything else that society tells you to do. You have the freedom to age messily if you like. Heck, it's your life, and it's in chaos that order is born!

Maybe you don't have a head full of black hair, but so what? You probably sucked your thumb at six, but you don't do that anymore, do you? It's the same thing.

Nostalgia is only helpful if it uplifts you. If it's taking you on a downward spiral of "how I wish I was that age again!", then it's high time you closed that album of old photos. New sunrises and sunsets await you. Make yourself some frothy cold coffee and move on!

There's nothing that you need to tick off by a certain age. We all have our own trajectories and our own truths to learn. Be courageous enough to own your messy self and your messy life.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Vaidehi is a teacher and mentor who is extremely passionate about pedagogy, writing, and the arts. She enjoys long conversations, writing and music. She runs her own website at [www.alearninghut.com](http://www.alearninghut.com). She also curates a magazine called *the Halli Times*, with the aim of reviving old-fashioned habits like reading and writing.

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