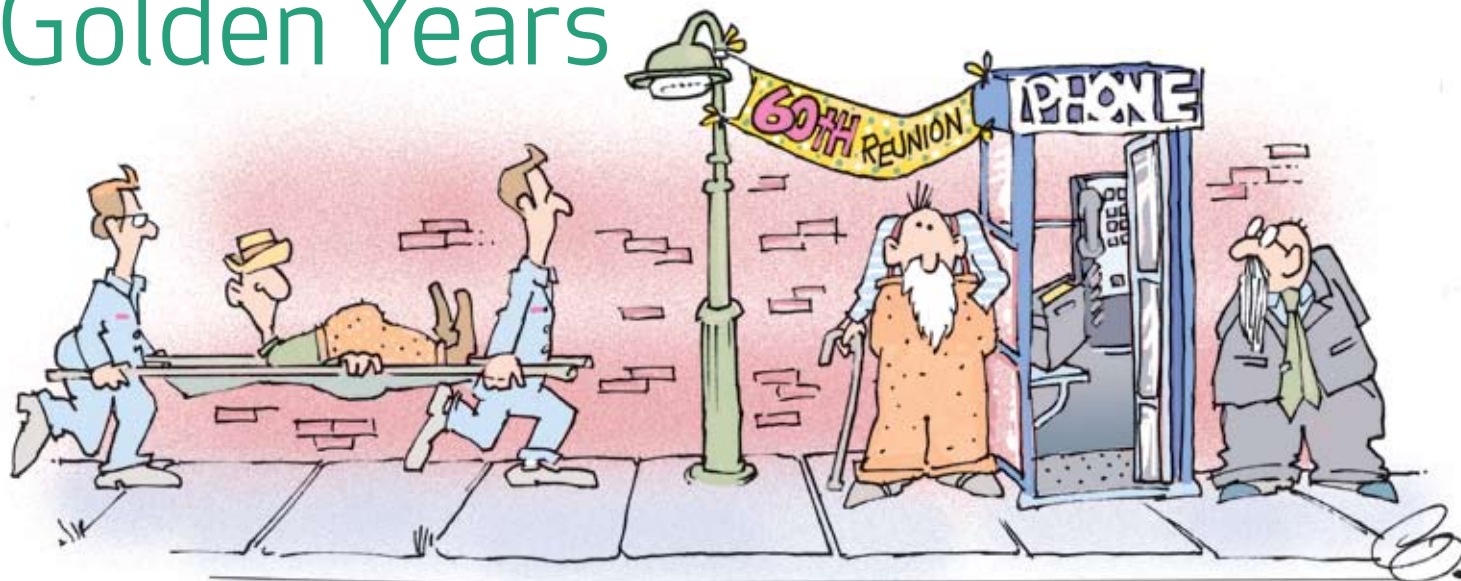


# Making Green in the Golden Years



It became depressingly apparent that I and a few others who were still ambulatory were all who were left of my graduating class.

→ Robert E. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION  
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*The worst of work nowadays is what happens to people when they cease work.*

— G.K. Chesterton

Of course I had thought about retirement, but it was always in the abstract much as you might, as a teenager, muse to yourself that one day you would drop by the Taj Mahal or see if you could ride all the rides at Disneyland in one day without throwing up.

I did actually retire once. Grudgingly, it became clear at the end of my first summer as a busboy at Knott's Berry Farm that, career-wise, I had probably peaked. My white uniform was lavishly decorated with boysenberry stains; my every pore redolent with the cloying scent of fried chicken fat. Reluctantly, I tendered my resignation. It was obvious that several years of obsequious toadying would be required before rising above my 40-cents-per-hour position to be CEO of the place.

At age 19, I was a man on the move. Conceding that a good time to retire is

before it's too late to have a good time, I enrolled in dental school based primarily on the observation that our family dentist seemed to have Wednesday afternoon free and his uniform reeked of nothing more annoying than the scent of oil of cloves. He drove a DeSoto Airflow, the most innovative car I had ever seen. I would have one of those I decided, or perhaps move up to a Chrysler. The Big Picture featured enjoying the perks of a profession that encouraged poking around in other people's mouths with a host of Rube Goldberg gadgets assisted by a nubile handmaiden. I would do this for maybe 20 years, tops, and then pack it in, my whole life ahead of me. The Agra-culture offered by the Taj Mahal could wait; it had been there since 1683, another decade or two wouldn't make much difference.

Somehow 25 years slipped by without my noticing it. I married, fathered three children, lost some hair, grew a mustache

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DR. BOB, CONTINUED FROM 502

to compensate, and was invited to my dental class reunion where 82 classmates seemed hale and hearty and none the worse for wear. A few birthdays later, for some inexplicable reason, the class spokesman announced a 50th reunion. What is this, I puzzled? Are we going to have a reunion every year now? I didn't attend. A classmate who now claimed to be 81 years old, sent me pictures. He said he and the other 30 balding, paunchy strangers missed me. I discounted this sentiment as I had never seen most of them in my life.

A couple of years later I received a questionnaire asking if I would be interested in the formation of a 60th

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reunion. Not really, I answered. It became depressingly apparent that I and a few others who were still ambulatory were all who were left of my graduating class. Everybody had either retired years ago or contributed to insurance actuarial tables

and dropped off the twig, leaving only a handful still able to cash their Social Security checks. The reunion, if held, could be easily accommodated in a venue no larger than a phone booth.

I must be the only one of that original stalwart group of 125 future dentists left who is still practicing after 66 years! A dubious honor and only held because I wasn't paying attention. There are two types of graduates: the grasshoppers and the ants. The ants plan. They live according to a plan, they invest in real estate, stocks, bonds, save for the future, become Amway reps. Retiring with several of their faculties still functional, they stop being serious about everything but golf, where they eventually keel over on the 14th dogleg, par 6 hole.

The grasshoppers' only concern is to avoid hitting life's windshields at speeds of 50 mpg or more. No plans, every day is summer until one day it isn't. Old age is the big windshield.

My classmate, who was No. 77 to my No. 76 (we didn't have names in those days), is now 96 years old and has been retired forever it seems to me. He is an ant of the first order. "Think before you quit," he advises. "Stay home for a week and watch daytime television."

"You're saying that all these dental retirees would love to be chairside again, having learned that the freedom to do anything they wish, wish they could do something else?" I asked.

"Well, not exactly," he said, "but wouldn't it be great if we could sell our experience for what it cost to get it?"

Good luck with that. Granted, the California Lottery Commission could easily convince me otherwise, but until it does, I hold the conviction that nothing would be so difficult as doing nothing. Somebody told my wife that retirement meant half the income and twice the husband. She hasn't mentioned the subject since. ■■■■