

An Art of Ageing Gracefully

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*"Youth is the gift of nature;
But ageing is a work of art..."*
Stanislau Jerzy Lec (1909-66, Polish Poet)

"Old age ain't no place for sissies".
Bette Davis (1908-89, American
Actress)

The original title of this book was "The Art of Ageing Gracefully". However, as soon as I started to put down in writing the experiences of my life, the lives of my congregations, colleagues, allies-in-life, and friends, it became obvious that this is just one art - among many. You, dear reader might have your own – perhaps even better - ways of tackling the autumn years of your life.

If you have not, yet, worked on your art, I would encourage you to start ASAP. Some early damages to your Physical, Intellectual and even Emotional dimension of your life may be irreversible.

“Gracefully” is a double-barrelled word. As an adverb, it means acting in an attractively elegant way, with dignity, panache. As an adjective, it states that I accept- even embrace - the fact that all I have – my nurture and nature - are gifts, graces from God. My life is full of graces.

The two meanings are linked. It is precisely because everything is a gift from God that I strive to look after all I have - and am. Not to do so would show disrespect for the donor and, as I approach my face-to-face meeting with God, that would not be a good idea.

I have avoided the trendy, egregious error of assuming that I am controlled by events. I refuse to see myself as a victim. Whatever the weather, I know I am captain of my ship. What comes my way maybe largely out of my control. However, it is up to me how I respond to whatever impinges on my PIES. I am responsible for my choices: the way I see the world and the way I behave. To live a human life is to make choices across the PIES. I have made mine. So here I am – as I am - for better and for worse.

My philosophy resonates with Richard Lovelace’s “Stone walls do not a prison make, /nor iron bars a cage: / Minds innocent and quiet take/ That for an hermitage.”

Thanks to lessons taught me by over-ambitious – and burnt out – clergy, I have acquired ‘existential humility’. I pace myself. I know my limitations as I strive to enhance the Kingdom of God in my neighbourhood.

Frustrations accelerate the ageing process. To slow this down I have, over the past 20 years, been using SWOT and SMART analyses.

You probably know that SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Strengths and weaknesses - internal to what I am doing —are things over which I have some control.

Opportunities and threats are external-things that are going on outside my control. If you go to my “A Journey to Eternity - 3” you will see how I managed to take advantage of opportunities and protected myself against threats.

SMART is an acronym for **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant), **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating), **A**chievable (agreed, attainable), **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based) and **T**ime bound (time-based, time limited.)

When the diocese moved me away from working with young people, I used SMART to help me shape my future. As the 2012 London Games were on the fast approaching horizon, I was convinced that God wanted me to get involved in sport.

Thanks to the wonderful generosity of Paul Leonard, I was able to conceive, shape and launch the John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport charity. It gave me new purpose in life. It kept me sane – and young at heart.

Working with Colm Hickey on our “Aim High for All” Virtues Programme (AVP) generated many a laugh. Road-testing it in schools around the country was fun.

To help you acquire wisdom sooner rather than later, I will share with you how I used SMART to shape my goals.

1. Specific.

My goal was clear and specific: the production and dissemination of a program - based on The Gospel Values - for the character development of young people. When drafting my goal – and working with Colm Hickey who did most of the leg-work on identifying elite sport role models that had said something inspirational - I tried to answer the five "W" questions.

i. What did I want to accomplish?

To produce a user-friendly programme for character development of young people.

ii. Why is this goal important?

Using sport as a metaphor for life, make the acquisition of virtues more attractive.

iii. Who is involved?

Primary and secondary teachers – using our guide booklet if necessary – will run the courses.

iv. Where is it located?

In schools around the country.

v. Which resources would be involved?

a) Funds I had raised, b) Colm's and my time c) Elite-sports personalities who had pronounced inspirational ideas on the virtues that made our gospel values visible in our booklets

2. Measurable.

To minimise worrying, I knew it was important to have measurable goals: objectives as we progressed towards our aim. Assessing progress helped me to stay focused, meet deadlines, and feel the excitement of getting closer to achieving my goal.

3. Achievable.

Thanks to the generous financial help from friends and getting Colm Hickey to join the team, the goal seemed realistic and attainable.

4. Relevant.

Given the way society was shaping up, offering young people the tools to acquire virtues - life-skills - seemed urgent.

5. Time-bound.

Every goal needs a target date. Gradually - step by step, not slowly! - and improving our program thanks to suggestions from our pilot schools - Colm and I achieved our goal.

As the years of my Journey to Eternity have grown, I have shaped my aim to "die young at an old age". If you have the stamina to read this book, you will see how I have tackled this.

When asked how I manage to look younger than my age would indicate, I say it is a mixture of right diet, exercise, life-style and prayer - as well as, obviously - my DNA; "Which earth has given, human hands have made".

A bright spot, however, is that what has also become clear in recent years is that genetics is only half of the discussion. Our lifestyles, as doctors are keen on telling us, are important in increasing or reducing our risk of various diseases. Research in the new field of epigenetics is finding that our lifestyle choices - the foods we put in our bodies, the chemicals we are exposed to, how active we opt to be, even our social environments - can actually alter our health at the level of the gene.

Even if our genes seem to be working against us, these choices can have big effects on our risk for disease. So, before throwing your hands up and saying, "What can I do? It's all up to my genes," improve your lifestyle. Stay in touch - and monitor - your attitude with your SONG: your Self, Others, Nature, and God.

Positive lifestyle choices we make – most notably, eating right, sleeping enough and exercising - may have just as powerful an effect on our genetic makeup, as negative ones - such as smoking and overeating to obesity- certainly do have.

Two recent studies illustrate this point. One found that eating well can "turn off" the genes that put one at higher risk for heart problems. The other showed that exercise could persuade stem cells to become bone and blood cells rather than fat cells. Each helps us see just how lifestyle variables work at the genetic level to modify our risk.

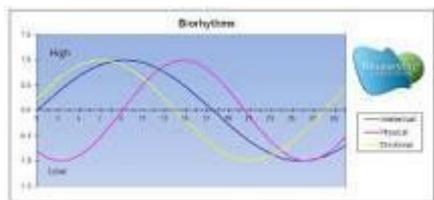
My choices have been underpinned by “The Serenity Prayer”, written in 1932-33 by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971).

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference.”

It is good, dear reader, to be at peace with what you are now able to do and learn not to get frustrated when your activity isn't what it used to be before.

Life has taught me to accept that due to my years on this planet I have diminishing speed, stamina, and strength - as well as memory. I take notes of everything. I use my diary: writing - and reading! - what I put there.

Experience over many years have taught me that there is an increasing area of my life in which I can do sometimes what at other times are beyond my ability. Biorhythms - in my experience - are a fact of life. Accepting this – and working with the SWOT and SMART programs - lessened my frustrations- and thus slowed down my ageing.



$$\text{Physical} = \sin(2\pi t / 23)$$

$$\text{Intellectual} = \sin(2\pi t / 33)$$

$$\text{Emotional} = \sin(2\pi t / 28)$$

Carpe dies - seize the days - not just *diem* or one day - for the optimal biorhythm days last a few dozen of hours.

When all my PIES are simultaneously at their peak, I can perform far more effectively than when all three are simultaneously at the lowest. In fact, I have heard that in many Japanese companies – where biorhythms are taken seriously– anyone with the lowest simultaneous three is banned from coming to work.

I have kept stretching - yet avoiding breaking - myself across the PIES.

I am grateful to God for life on earth and in eternity. I find solace in death. Not only because I am convinced that death is birth into divine eternity, but because it acts as a stimulant to my activities. Thanks to death, time is a diminishing resource that needs to be used to the best of my ability.

We are designed to die and are given time of earth to become *capax Dei* – capable of life with God. As in my mother's womb I had time to develop my vital organs so I could live on after birth, life now is given to me to develop my ability after death to live with God in eternity.

If it is God's will that I become ill and cannot be cured, so be it. No complaints. I am here on earth to do God's will.

So let us look at my PIES.

P - The Physical.

Scientific progress is accelerating improvements in medicine. There are now new molecules that enable mice to age slower, stay fatter and healthier for longer. Soon – it seems – these will be available for human consumption. (Probably after I have died. Who knows at what price?)

Researchers are confident that soon there will be methods of slowing down brain ageing and even, perhaps eliminating dementia. Our bodies are not like machines. They are capable of self-repair. Young bodies fight diseases easier.

Though the future of this may be rosy, I know I am alive here and now – as things are.

I now try to keep tabs on my eyes – having an annual eye test (Yes, I have incipient cataracts coming on); my teeth – twice daily brushing, with a daily use of TePe Brushes. I have lost two teeth - molars - that do not create problems with chewing so have not had them replaced.

I enjoy my six-monthly check-ups.

I know that my hearing is fading. In a loud, crowded restaurant, I find it harder to follow a conversation across a wide table – or hear a soft-spoken confessee whisper her sins in the confessional.

I see my loss of hair, as well as acquisition of wrinkles and saggy bits – on elbows and the rest – as 'long-service medals' for my years of life on earth.

I do not waste the weakness/evil in my Heart. I use vanity to control my gluttony and pride to combat the other six capital sins. To be able to help God for as long as possible I keep on keeping on with my early morning exercises.

Given the fact that I have celebrated my 83rd birthday – and spent nine months in my mother's womb - I do 84 press-ups on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays and 84 full-squats on Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays. (A video of my early morning exercise routine can be found on my website fathervlad.com.)

Unless there is serious rain, rather take short bus rides, I tend to travel on foot - and I always walk up and down Tube escalators, even the longest one at Angel station - and up to four flights of stairs in a hospital.

Laughter, even forced laughter, is healthy. Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease. Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain. Moreover, endorphins secreted by laughter can help when people are uncomfortable or in a depressed mood.

As Scripture reminded us, "laughter is the best medicine." (Proverbs 17, 22)

Under the Nazis and then behind the Iron Curtain, humor kept people sane. Some of the jokes passed down to me are in Appendix A

In 2021, given my 52 years of priesthood and 83 years on this planet (82 breathing, + 9 months I my mother's womb; rounded off to next integer), to raise funds for a new Chapel Organ at St Mary's University, Twickenham, I walked (52 laps x 400meters = 20.8 k = 12.9 miles 83 times. 83 days x 52 laps = 4,316 laps. (Total distance around 670 miles; some 25 marathons).

I have begun to have balance problems. As all too many of my ageing friends have fallen and broke leg or hip – and died soon after - I hold on to solid things in the bathroom and, when I need to turn, do so slowly.

I also have flexibility difficulties. Not easy - when dressing - to pull up my left leg high enough to push it through my underpants.

When I meet people who have become physically – and/or mentally – incapacitated and ask “Why am I still here?”, I reply “you are a catalyst helping younger people become more generous. So, keep on, keeping on, if you can, with a smile on your face.”

I am grateful to God for treating my health so benignly. Apart from sciatica down both legs: first the right in 1960 - which stayed around until I left Opus Dei in 1982 - and the left in 2018; and two kidney stones – both on the left – the first in 1987, the second in 1997, I have had good health. Even – it seems – I managed to avoid Covid (I write this 12.6.22!)

So far, I have not had to use what many people consider takes away dignity and grace. A Colostomy bag. However, dear reader, if you or someone you know has to use one, remember that The Queen Mother (1900-2002) had one for years and – in public - was always graceful.

Arthritis. Thanks to my Goddaughter Kate, who introduced me to a copper bracelet and Turmeric, Omega 3, and Glucosamine Sulphate, which - on top of my daily 75mg aspirin I take after breakfast - has staved off the worst effects. Now, my right hand – which at its worst was too painful for me even to shake hands! - is fine and the left, just a wee bit swollen and weak.

Having researched its effects - and aware of the ethics of Big Pharma - I refuse to take statins.

I watch my diet. I take the five-a-day seriously and drink an Actimel with breakfast. To avoid the typical tendency for growing years to increase my waistline, I have my own 'double 2-3' diet': two out of three days, I tend to eat just two out of three meals. Cutting out lunch and - apart from feast days - nibbles between meals.

To keep my memory in shape - and reduce the risk of another kidney stone, I drink plenty of fluids; whenever possible, chilled water.

I embrace, not complain about the alterations over my lifetime to our culture: with its crash helmets for motorbike riders, seat-belts in cars, decimalisation, the increasing areas of 20mph speed limits- and Brexit. *C'est la vie*. Pointless – and ageing - to get nostalgic about the 'good old days'

Tattoos and piercing - for me a sign of uncultured barbarism - have, when I see them on women, an ethically beneficent effect. They anaesthetise any libido that might, having seen the female form at a distance, started to lurk in my heart.

To help me walk upright, I keep my glasses on and look through them, not above them. I force myself to pick up rather than drag my feet. Heels last longer!

Having learned that sufficient sleep helps the brain to recover - and minimise the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's - I now sleep at least eight hours a night.

Margaret Thatcher's post-retirement demise was a powerful reminder of the consequences of cutting down too much on sleep.

I wear well-fitting shoes. When young, I was lucky enough to have my parents and nanny buy shoes that were wide enough never to cripple my feet.

My prostate is not perfect. At night and early mornings, the flow is often a mere trickle. To do what I can, I have eliminated red and processed meat, high-fat dairy and saturated fats.

Alcohol before I go to bed numbs my twitchy-tickling sciatica toes so I can fall asleep without delay.

I am wary of sunburn yet stay in touch with the sun to reduce the risk of D vitamin deficiency.

I try to look after my appearance. Good for morale to shave, shower, keep back of head hair short - and keep clothes clean.

I walk as much as I can. I remember - and teach - the mantra, "use it or lose it."

I - The Intellectual.

To decelerate my brain ageing – and, I hope, the risk of dementia. - I stay curious - and I write, not only to pass on the lesson's life has taught me - but also to stay mentally healthier for longer. I coerce myself to write: UCW fortnightly piece and books, such as this. Thanks to the invitation from the Universe Newspaper and then the Covid lockdowns, I have evolved from being a social entrepreneur to a writer. My writing may not be good, but it is keeping my mind active and thus - I hope - forestalling the onset of dementia.

To stay as young as possible, I avoid 'thinking old.'

I accept – even try to embrace – changes in technology (though I admit I am reluctant to use my social media platforms) and our culture's vocabulary.

For your entertainment, some examples of politically correct words

Homosexual – Gay

Homeless – Outdoor urban dwellers

Insane – Reality challenged

Perverted – Sexually dysfunctional

Prostitute – Sex worker / Sex care provider

Stupid – Intellectually impaired / Unschooled

Dishonest – Ethically disorientated

Abortion – Pregnancy termination

Dustbin Man – Sanitation Engineer

Ticket Collector on the train and/or platform - Revenue collection officer!

Insult – Emotional rape

Bisexual prostitute – Equal opportunity prostitute

Poor – Economically marginalised

Immigrant – Newcomer

Illegal immigrant – Irregular immigrant / undocumented worker

Right wing protest – Riot

Left wing riot – Protest

Drunk – Inebriated / chemically inconvenienced

Terrorist – Freedom fighter / rebel / protester / insurgent

Global warming – Climate change

Job losses – Job restructuring

Criminal – Behaviourally challenged

Broken Home – Dysfunctional family

Caretaker – Site engineer

Fat – Metabolic overachiever

Slum area – Economically deprived area

Foreign food – Ethnic cuisine

Housewife – Domestic engineer

Jungle – Rain forest

Natural disaster – Global warming incident

Sex change – Gender reassignment

Tramp – Homeless person

Unemployed – Economically inactive

Preferential treatment – Affirmative action

Racist – Someone who disagrees with the far-left

Nazi – Someone who disagrees with the far-left –

Fascist - Someone who disagrees with the far-left

Husband– Partner

Wife- Partner

Crime rate - Street activity index

Robbery - Wealth redistribution

Vomiting – Unplanned re-examination of recent food choices

Lying – Economical with the truth

Wanted criminal – Person of interest

Patriot - Troublemaker / pest / nuisance / agitator

Promiscuous – Sex addict

Chairman – Chairperson / Chair

Fireman – Firefighter

Merry Christmas – Season's Greetings

Blackboard – Chalkboard
Illegal - Undocumented voter
Christmas - Winter Festival
Lies – Alternative facts
Printing money – Quantitative easing
Immigrants – Labour supporters
Illegal subletting - Irregular subletting
Shoplifting – Irregular shopping
Black sheep – Outcast
Blackmail - Extortion
Postman - Mail carrier
Blacklist - Banned
Manhole - Utility hole
Murder - Unauthorised termination of life
Rational fear - Phobia
Uneducated - Unschooled / Lacking a formal education
Flip – Easel (Flip is a derogatory word for Filipinos)
Mexican - Hispanic
Dustman - Sanitation engineer
Ghetto- Economically deprived area
Housewife – Domestic engineer
Illegal aliens - Undocumented migrants
Blind - Visually unfavourable
Lazy - Motivationally deficient
Unemployed - Unintentionally at leisure / non-waged
Smelly - Nasally disturbing
Best man for the job – Best person for the job
Man in the street – Average person
Waitress - Waiter Server
Failure – Non-traditional success
Forefathers - Ancestors
Man-made - Artificial
Manpower – Human resources
Mankind – Humanity
Right-hand man – Chief assistant

Christian name – Forename

Sportsmanship – Fairness

Tax man – Tax officer

Workmanlike – Efficient

Steward - Flight attendant

Stewardess - Flight attendant

Deaf – Hearing impaired

Disease - Disorder

Businessman – Businessperson

Actress – Actor

Manageress - Manager Spinster - Bachelorette White lie – Lie

Lie – alternative truth.

A manhole cover - maintenance hole cover.

Plastic surgery – Cosmetic surgery

Coloured - African American or Black In the UK, ('BAME' stands for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' and 'BME' for 'Black and Minority Ethnic').

Cannot use the n word – which in the 40s was a colour used by my sister's school.

Due to his perception that children with what we now know as Down's syndrome (named after British doctor John Langdon Down, who fully described the syndrome in 1866.) shared facial similarities with the Mongolian populations, German physician Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (11 May 1752 – 22 January 1840), called them Mongols. Now, the only acceptable words are "Down's Syndrome".

In touch with the divine most of the time, I have avoided ageing by worrying only about the little that I can control. For the rest? "*Que sera, sera*; whatever will be will be, the future's not ours to see".

At Imperial College, I took up rowing. Apart from having fun and staying fit, it taught me that as in a boat we row backwards, so in life we do not see the future. However the cox does. My cox is *Yeshua*, the Son of God alive in my conscience.

Omnia in bonum (OIB): "all will be well - when in love with God." (Roman 8, 28). One of self-motivating mantras is, "I do my best and leave the rest to God." My daily question is "What is my best right now?"

Three - well now four - examples: that have helped me shape my attitudes to frustrating 'hold-ups'.

1. Early one Sunday morning, at the bottom of the hill, driving northwards at Hendon, the car in front of me, as the lights turned green, stalled. I groaned. However, thank God.

As I approached the traffic light at the top of the hill and my lights were green, a car shot across from right to left. Had I not been stalled down below, it would have hit me – on my driving-seat side.

2. A friend was held up by heavy traffic and thus arrived at The Twin Towers AFTER the planes had crashed. Had he been in time, his time would almost certainly have come.

3. Something similar with another friend, this time in Australia. Due to a number of causes, he arrived late to get on the light plane that was due to take him to his up-country destination. Later that day, he learned that it had crashed.

4. A recent reminder of OIB.

On 20th June 2022, unable to cross the Heston Road due to passing cars, I just missed the 120 bus. Instant "shucks". Then aware of OIB, I quickly calmed. A couple with their young boy walked up to the bus stop. After a short pause, the man thanked and praised me for the blue and yellow ribbons pinned to my lapel. "We are from Ukraine." He had been in London for a few years. His wife and child had arrived two days ago. We carried on a staccato conversation - their English was not too good - until the bus came. After we had all shaken hands, I stayed downstairs. They went upstairs

Had I not missed that bus, I would not have had that conversation - and then, later, on the tube platform I would not have been able to answer the questions raised by an Irish couple, "How do we get to Paddington?"

Therefore, whenever I am held up, I shrug and stay calm. The 'I' and the 'S' calm and assuage my 'E'.

A sense of humour helps the mind stay young. When asked, "How are you?" I tend to reply "Wonderful." And maybe add, "full of wonder at the beauty of creation and the absurdity of so many of our politicians."

I am determined to eschew humanity's perennial, old-age grumpiness. A few quotes for, I hope, your entertainment. They certainly are there for mine.

"We live in a decaying age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient. They frequently inhabit taverns and have no self-control." Words inscribed on a 6,000-year-old Egyptian tomb.

Then there is, "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words... When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of restraint." These are words ascribed to Hesiod, a Greek poet generally thought to have been active between 750 and 650 BCE, around the same time as Homer.

Moreover, in the same vein, "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers." The quote is commonly attributed to Socrates (a Greek philosopher from Athens who is credited as the founder of Western philosophy and among the first moral philosophers of the ethical tradition of thought. He died 15 February 399 BCE, but apparently, there is no conclusive evidence that it was he who actually said it.

The quote may have come from Plato's Republic Book 4, where Socrates says the following regarding things that he thinks have been neglected: "I mean such things as these: when the young are to be silent before their elders; how they are to show respect to them by standing and making them sit; what honour is due to parents; what garments or shoes are to be worn; the mode of dressing the hair; deportment and manners in general. You would agree with me? Yes."

The Greek philosopher Plato (429? - 347 BCE) who studied under Socrates, also complained about the youth of the day. "What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?"

Then, quite a few hundred years later, in 1274 CE, Peter the Hermit joined the chorus. "The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint ... As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress."

To keep the theme going closer to our age, in the 1790 American book "Memoirs of the Blooms Grove Family", Reverend Enos Hitchcock wrote: "The free access which many young people have to romances, novels, and plays has poisoned the mind and corrupted the morals of many a promising youth; and prevented others from improving their minds in useful knowledge. Parents take care to feed their children with wholesome diet; and yet how unconcerned about the provision for the mind, whether they are furnished with salutary food, or with trash, chaff, or poison?"

And, on it goes. In 1904, psychologist and educator Granville Stanley Hall published "The Psychology of Adolescence", in which he warned that it was a dangerous time, particularly for young folk. "Never has youth been exposed to such dangers of both perversion and arrest as in our own land and day. Increasing urban life with its temptations, prematurities, sedentary occupations, and passive stimuli just when an active life is most needed, early emancipation and a lessening sense for both duty and discipline, the haste to know and do all befitting man's estate before its time, the mad rush for sudden wealth and the reckless fashions set by its gilded youth—all these lack some of the regulatives they still have in older lands with more conservative conditions."

Given this perpetual view of oldies on youth, I have decided not to become an aged grump. I like the young. After all, I was brought up with them.

With age, death becomes an increasingly common companion. Attendance at funerals of friends and allies-in-life accelerates. Soon, the few that will remain – and are still mobile - will come to mine.

If the world is like a chessboard, of course there are black squares - which, once again, seem to have grown in size. However, I have decided to concentrate on the white ones. Given my condition as I write this, it has, I believe, been a wise choice.

We are what we ingest - across the PIES. Therefore, I take care with my reading and viewing.

Worrying ages people. As I have no children, the imagined future is less of a concern than it must be for parents and grandparents. I am glad that I am old and will be spared the inevitable effects of global warming and probably cyber - if not atomic - warfare. I will not have to witness the shortages of water in some areas and the migrations and political unrest triggered off by swathes of the earth becoming uninhabitable. I will not have to witness - albeit, if the West is lucky, at a long distance - the effects of China vying with the United States for hegemony in what we call the Far East.

Thanks to my age, I will not have to face for too long our culture's growing gender conundrums.

Having seen babies born – and how they now look, aged slightly less than me - I know that people - like society and technology - change. I try never to judge a book by the cover of its earlier editions.

To stay in step with reality, I know I have needed constant *metanoia* – a repentance, a change of opinion - about so much.

Time has taught me that it is the person – the character – inside a body is what counts. In my teens, the body seemed important. Now, the I, E and S are clearly paramount.

When discussing the past, bear in mind that for an increasing number of folk, an increasing section of your life is history.

To sum up, "the more I know, the more I know I don't know and I don't know what I don't know."
C'est ma vie.

E - The Emotional

Some people I know say that emotions are like the weather: uncontrollable. Not our responsibility. However, I know that my PIES are mutually interactive and what I read, view, hear and think - and how I pray - changes the way I feel. As, of course, does music.

Thanks to my priesthood – with its weddings, baptisms, instructions, mentoring and care - I am socially richly connected. Having revisited the list of names I invited to my 80th birthday, I have seen that there are some 200 friends, allies-in-life and colleagues. A few are real friends. Many are allies-in-life and some are colleagues. All enrich my life and help me stay young at heart – and thus across the PIES of life.

At Westminster Cathedral and then that splendid celebration at Hall – so generously funded by John Studzinski and Niall FitzGerald – while thanking everyone, I stated that though I will never appear on the 100 Top Rich People. Were there a list of The Top Richest in Friends, I would be there number one. Alleluia. Thank God.

In Jn 15, 15, Jesus said, "I call you friends". God's friendship is the key to open the door to The Kingdom of God. Living as a part of God's family keeps me young at heart.

To avoid – or at least minimise - the risks of social isolation and loneliness, I encourage you to make friends – and keep them – so that when you do not need them, they are there for you. To sustain friends, you need the enlightened self-interest of commitment, time and effort.

Mentoring – spiritually guiding – others has taught me how beneficial it is to have a broad portfolio of interests and support agencies: hobbies, sports, charities, and cohorts of similar minded people, so that when a few have departed this world of Space-Time, there are still enough to keep me afloat and joyful.

One of my pet hatreds is hearing people state "Friends and family" - as though 'family' were outside the parameter of 'friendship'. I prefer, "friends, including your family". For me - after health and hope - long-range friends are the best blessings there are in life.

Regarding friendship – after health and hope the most precious gift in life - I subscribe to both Aristotle and Cicero.

While Aristotle leaves room for the idea that relationships based on advantage alone or pleasure alone can give rise to friendships. He believes that such relationships have a smaller claim to be called friendships than those that are based partly or wholly on virtue. "Those who wish good things to their friends for the sake of the latter are friends most of all, because they do so because of their friends themselves, not coincidentally."

Friendships that are based partly or wholly on virtue are desirable not only because they are associated with a high degree of mutual benefit, but also because they are associated with companionship, dependability, and trust.

Cicero admonishes us that "even though we have something valuable to gain from true friendship - advice, companionship, and support in difficult times - it isn't transactional. A real friend never keeps score since the reward of friendship is friendship itself."

An ally-in-life is something else. Allies-in-life are helpers, members of the teams that provide assistance and support in an ongoing effort or activity.

If you work at it, colleagues - people you work with - may become allies-in-life and a few may end up as friends; enriching your life - hugely.

To gain friends – and keep them – I know I need to be and act as their friend. A perpetual birthday diary has been a great ally.

Friends as well as allies-in-life, colleagues and acquaintances die. A friend is someone who is an extension of yourself and thus his or her loss hurts, generating a void. Grief is the price of love. A cost worth paying.

As I say, 'living virtues is an expression of enlightened self-interest. It is Ubuntu: good for beloved AND lover.'

I stay in touch with younger people: families I have married and whose children I have baptised, or prepared for their first Holy Communion, as well as past pupils and parishioners. To stay young - well younger than my years on this planet might indicate – I take time with the young. It is worthwhile. My pro bono, excellent dentist is a lovely woman whose parents I married, whom I baptised, whose wedding I celebrated and then baptised her children.

S - The Spiritual.

Thanks to my Eriskay "Pentecostal" experience, (You will find that in "AJTE -1); I live in what Jesus Christ called "The Kingdom of God." While all too many folk take God for granted, or forget He is there - a bit like their take on gravity, I have been blessed - my life enriched - with a conscious presence of God. Thus, I have never felt alone.

God is with me as the sustaining *Abba* (Prodigal Father- a bit like HM Queen Elizabeth 2 is "Your Majesty" to the public yet "Mummy" to Prince Charles).; as the Son, *Yeshua*, the guide to and friend in my life; and as *Ruach*, the motivating feminine Spirit. Together - as one – they have slowed down my ageing.

Seeing death - my birth into divine eternity - as a friend gives my Heart buoyancy. As teenagers look forward to being 'grown up', I look forward to life in eternity where I will be, finally, fully alive – and me. To see what I mean by that word "Heart", take a look at my book, "Life Squared" It can be purchased on my website fathervlad.com.

In spite of St Augustine of Hippo's take on what he called Original Sin (Gen 3, 1-7), and maybe it's because I have not had to suffer a Russian or Chinese Gulag – or spent time in a Japanese POW camp – I see the majority of humans as radically good though weak. More like a clean plastic bag than a rotten leather case. Neither can carry safely more than three bottles of wine.

I am no longer naive. I know there is small percentage of mad and or bad characters. Psychopaths - like Hitler, Stalin and Mao – as well as sociopaths and the like give our humanity's brand a bad name. Psychopaths tend to be manipulative, can be seen by others as more charming, lead a semblance of a normal life, and minimize risk in criminal activities. Sociopaths tend to be more erratic, rage-prone, and unable to lead a normal life.

Whenever I am about to celebrate Mass, rather than start with its normal-negative "let us call to mind our sins," I prefer, "Let us pause on those TAPS. I celebrate mass to Thank God for all the gifts I have received and still have. (1) I Ask God for our needs. I Praise God for the beauty of creation. And I say Sorry for my sins."

I see the so-called 'original' sin (Gen 3, 6) as evidence of stupidity – a lack of enlightenment. Therefore, throughout the day when I am not concentrating on the urgent, I keep in touch with the important: The Word (*Sophia*, wisdom) that is Yeshua. Christ, as the Vatican 2 Council (SC, 7) reminded us, is present at Mass - and thus in life - not only in the priest, the Sacrament and the Word, but also in people, the congregation. As you will find in my "Life Squared", watching people has taught me so much about God.

If you would like a fuller picture of my philosophy and theology, buy a copy of my "Life Squared – a handbook for life in an accelerating world". It can be obtained on my website fathervlad.com

Life has taught me how psychosomatic accidents tend to occur when my Heart is not at peace. Inner strife seems to attract exterior problems. When people complain of a 'run of bad luck', I am inclined to whisper, "How peaceful is your heart. If you find that peace, your luck might change." In my role as a pastoral-priest, I try to teach that striving for inner peace – ultimately a gift from God - demonstrates enlightened self-interest.

Viktor Frankl, (1905-97), whose Logotherapy theories were heavily influenced by his personal experiences of suffering and loss in Nazi concentration camps, became convinced that human nature urgently needs hope and is motivated by the search for a purpose in life. He knew that without a purpose, people die inside.

Then there is The Church. As I am a man of God, not a man of the church, the follies of ecclesial administrations are a pain but not lethal to my faith. For me, the Church is a vehicle, at times in need of servicing and occasionally of serious repair.

To thrive rather than merely survive, I know it is vital to identify a fresh role in life. When, dear reader, one door closes - through redundancy, the decisions of your bosses or retirement - knock a hole in the wall and, as I did, build a new one.

Your identity needs to be defined by more than your job. I have developed a wide portfolio of identity generators and supporters. There is my priesthood, my role at St Mary's University, my writing, my friends and allies-in-life, and recently my role as carer of an 89-year-old.

Discovering my new roles has given my life purpose, which has not only launched my boat but gave it momentum so that - like water-skiing – it has prevented me from sinking. I have, so far, avoided depression.

(1) Gratitude, I have discovered, releases benign hormones in my body! It is, as so many virtues, enlightened self-interest to be grateful.

Recently, a long-term friend asked me "Are you lonely, Vlad?" I honestly replied "No. I am not a consummate extrovert. I need my time alone with God."

As my glorious and long-range friend Sergio put it, "we meet people who buy things that they don't really want, with money that they don't really have; to impress people whom they don't really like!" For me, money is like water. As I use little, I am blessed with having enough. And it is clean.

Holding a grudge can have a toxic effect on your body. It can raise blood pressure and increase risk of stroke or heart attack. It can impair the functioning of the immune system and increase stress hormones.

Forgiveness - when it is authentic and thus like God's for me - wishes well and offers help to the guilty – is a great source of wellbeing.

Maturity – another way of saying I am old – enables me to relax in the way I am, with no need to prove anything.

Alive in the kingdom of God, I dare – indeed delight in being – different; with values and thus virtues the world without God does not have.

To reward you, dear reader, for staying on this far, I will share "Vlad's seven steps to joy through working in and for the Kingdom of God."

1. Pray to see possibilities. 2. Select – within the parameters of possibilities - the ones you enjoy. 3. Commit yourself wholeheartedly. 4. Work hard. 5. Endure, keeping on keeping on. 6. Learn. Maybe priorities change. 7. If so, back to number one.

My vocation, my role in life, is to help God make the world a better place, more like his dream of The Kingdom of God. That purpose keeps me active, hopeful, slows down my ageing and enables me to become the best version of myself – not in competition with anyone else but me. Striving to improve my PB – my personal best – keeps me challenged and alive in hope.

To sum up. I have discovered that the secret of not just a happy but even a joyful life is “Living by giving.”

As they say and some sing, “Someone to love is the answer” For me, that one is God.

Life is beguiling. So far, bottom line, a joy.

Appendix A

Hitler is being driven fast along a forest road. Suddenly a pig runs across the road and is hit - and killed.

Adolf asks the driver to stop. "Please go to the cottage from which the pig had run. We need to say we are sorry." Off goes his chauffeur.

Time passes. Eventually the driver staggers back. "What held you up? "Ask Hitler.

"Well, I knocked on the door and when the man opened it I said, Heil Hitler! The pig is dead. And they brought out the schnapps and started to celebrate."

* In Soviet Russia you don't iron curtains. Iron Curtains you.

* A CIA agent is sent on a spy mission to Moscow, Soviet Union. He goes to a grocery store and writes down in his diary "There is no food".

He then goes to a clothes shop and puts down in the diary "there are no shoes".

He goes out of the shop and a KGB agent waits for him outside. "You know, 10 years ago we would have shot you for that."

The CIA agent writes in his diary "There are no bullets".

* The Jew was studying Hebrew in his cell when the guard sneered at him, "Why are you wasting your time studying that language? You know you'll die here."

The Jew replied, "It is said that Hebrew is the language spoken in Heaven."

The Guard asked, "What if you go to hell?"

To which the Jew said, "Well, I already know Russian..."

*One day the commissar was inspecting a potato farm in the Soviet Union and asked the farmer how his yields were.

The farmer said, "Oh commissar, the potatoes are so bountiful that together they can reach the foot of God." The commissar stopped and said, "Have you forgotten your communist teachings? There is no God!" To which the farmer said, "Exactly, that's why there's no potatoes."

*An older man is finally able to leave the Soviet Union in the late 1980s for the first time in his life.

His wife and son have already left and settled in the States, and he's finally able to go and join them.

On his way out through the Soviet border, the guard looks through his luggage and finds a bust of Lenin.

"What is this?" he asks.

"Don't ask me **what** this is, ask me **who** this! This is Vladimir Lenin, the great hero that fought for the rights of the people in our country, and I'm bringing him with me to remind myself to continue that battle in America!"

The guard lets him through, and he is able to go on the plane to America. Once he arrives, the American border guard goes through his luggage and finds the bust of Lenin.

"What is this?" he asks.

"Don't ask me *what* this is, ask me *who* this! This is Vladimir Lenin, the fiendish monster who destroyed my beautiful homeland! I am bringing him with me to remind myself the mistakes of the past."

The guard lets him through, and he is able to go into the country, where he takes a taxi to the house his wife and son are staying. After reuniting with them, the son sees the bust of Lenin, and asks, "Papa, who is this?"

The man smiles and says, "My son, don't ask me 'who' this is; ask me 'what' this! This, my son, is 18 pounds of gold!"

*One secret policeman asks another, "What do you think of the regime?" ...

Nervously, the second policeman replies, "The same as you, comrade." At that point the first one pulls out handcuffs and says, "In that case, it is my duty to arrest you."

*Every other Friday a guard at the wheelbarrow factory saw a worker coming out of the factory pushing a wheelbarrow packed with hay.

The guard searched inside the hay, found nothing and let the man go. This ritual repeated over several years until a time when the guard was about to retire from the wheelbarrow factory.

When the man pushing the wheelbarrow appeared at the gate, he told him: "I know you are stealing something from the wheelbarrow factory. I am just about to retire, and this is my last day here. I will not tell anybody, but, please, let me know what you are stealing from the wheelbarrow factory!" The man smiled and answered, "Oh, I am stealing the wheelbarrows."

*Moscow, a policeman sees a Jew holding a Hebrew dictionary.

-Why are you learning Hebrew? You know you cannot leave.

-I am learning Hebrew so that I can talk to Moses and Abraham when I get to heaven.

-And if you go to hell?

-I already speak Russian.

* At the Jachymov uranium mines, two prisoners talk:

-How many years did you get?

-Five.

-What did you do?

-Nothing.

-Don't lie! You get ten for that!