

EMBRACE YOUR AGE

You can be better than ever



JAMES B. FLAHERTY

An optimistic octogenarian with a bright future.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the people who make every day of my life worthwhile. So, friends, this book is for you and for what each of you has meant to me, from the beginning of my life to this very moment. And I hope I make every day of your life better too. XO, Jim

EIGHTEEN MEANINGFUL, EASY-TO-READ CHAPTERS

A few hard truths, some laughs, maybe a tear or two, but hopefully a new point of view for you, a new realization that every day is a miracle and that you have the power to make magic happen!

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A SHORT, FRIENDLY FOREWORD FROM THE AUTHOR

If you read *Dear Old Friends*, the predecessor to this book, you'll remember it was based on a love letter to all the much older friends I was blessed to have my entire life—people who lovingly pushed, criticized, and praised me as I set out to find a satisfying life. It is a sweet, friendly book with lots of good common-sense suggestions for being happier with yourself, and a more huggable friend, parent, grand-parent, husband, wife, employer . . . you get the idea.

Embrace Your Age is a little tougher because, well, because I'm eighty-seven and not as patient with self-denial and/or kidding yourself. I'd like you to read *Embrace Your Age* with an open mind.

JAMES B. FLAHERTY

I'll meet you in your bathroom (you'll understand
that non-risqué comment later on.) Until soon,
XO, Jim

Chapter One

ARE YOU JUST STARTING TO LIVE?

*If a productive life is from age twenty to ninety,
then fifty-five must be the beginning of the
second part.*

Got that? Age fifty-five is the beginning . . . not the beginning of the end. It's the beginning, a time when every step, every decision, every direction is wiser—because you are. When I hear a fifty-year-old say, "It's all over—I'm fifty," I want to give them a shovel and suggest they start digging their own grave. Come on, folks. Fifty is the new thirty. At age eighty-seven (yes, I was eighty-seven in September

2022), I can truthfully tell you I thought I was maybe sixty—while, I don't believe my mother and my Florida birth certificate are lying, I'm not through. Through with what, you ask? Hmm, how about living and loving life, waking up every day with a goal in mind?

Oops, I left learning out of that list. Research is showing if you go on learning in your later years, your mind won't drift toward dementia. That's why, in my last book, *Dear Old Friends: Stay Young, Stop Thinking Old, and Love Your Life Every Day*, I advocate a passion for everyone—a reason for waking up with a smile every day, especially when that reason involves your mind, like painting or writing or learning a new language or taking piano lessons or learning how to play bridge . . . and the list goes on and on. (Note: My original subtitle of the first book was “A Loving Reminder the Band Won't Stop Playing till You Stop Dancing Xo, Jim.” Although I liked the melody of the words, I changed it to speak directly to its audience.) Read the new subhead again near the beginning of this paragraph.

Here's a happy story. A close chumette of mine, an 83.5-year-old terrific dame, has gone back to college to get the degree she never earned six decades ago. "It's so much fun, Jim. When I first walked into classes, the kids looked at me like I was Grandma Moses reincarnated. Now, we're . . . well, buddies. They invite me to go to the library with them and now and then to a pizza joint. You know, Jim. I love it. I haven't felt so young and vital for at least twenty years." I can't stop smiling when she comes over to dinner. And besides living up to the intellectual challenge of her courses, she has become, well, hip. She argues politics with her new friends. They ask her opinion about their casual and sometimes frivolous personal relationships. "I try hard not to shock them. I hear them sometimes holding back, for fear they'll say something that might offend me. Hah! If I told them some of the things we did—don't you dare shake your judgmental head at me, Flaherty—their hair would fall out. But I feel different about myself. Do you like what I'm wearing? I went shopping with

two of my new girlfriends, and we went to the Gap!”

Just writing about her juices me up. And I want to feel that way about you—even if I don’t know you. You know you, or do you? Let’s talk about you and your chronological age. How old were you on your last birthday? Did you think, “Wow—I’m getting old!” If you said that to yourself, shame on you. I’m sure you’ve heard the saying, “*You’re only as old as you think.*” And it’s true. So, let’s start over—did you really say to yourself, “I’m getting old”? Oy vey.

A great way to realize you are not getting old is to read Chip Conley’s daily blog called *The Wisdom Well*, which he writes from his Modern Elder Academy. I’m a devoted disciple of Chip, whose hand I’ve never shook. Here’s a wonderful, and recent entry.¹

1- Reprinted with permission. Chip Conley, “What’s the Ripening Date for Your Profession,” *Wisdom Well* (blog), Modern Elder Academy, February 12, 2022, <https://wisdomwell.modernelderacademy.com/whats-the-ripening-date-for-your-profession>.

What's the Ripening Date for Your Profession?

Historically, society has been very clear about expiration dates for certain professions.

Fashion models: 30 years old (unless you're Maye Musk or Jeff Hamaoui).

Pro athletes: 35 years old if they're lucky (unless you're Tom Brady).

Software engineer: 40 years old (unless you're Carol Shaw).

Advertising exec: 45 years old (unless you're Lee Clow).

Arthur Brooks' piece in "The Atlantic," "[Your Professional Decline is Coming \(Much\) Sooner Than You Think](#)," chronicles how career obsolescence has accelerated in the digital age. It's a sobering article, but there's some genuine hope toward the end of the article. He writes: "The best synthesizers and explainers of complicated ideas—that is, the best teachers—tend to be in their mid-60s or older, some of them well into their 80s. That older people, with their stores of wisdom, should be the most

successful teachers seems almost cosmically right. No matter what our profession, as we age, we can dedicate ourselves to sharing knowledge in some meaningful way.”

What are the professions that ripen with age? Professor? Mediator? Life coach? Author, tour guide, counselor or therapist, “modern elder” in a tech company, caregiver, religious or spiritual leader, workshop facilitator? Go ahead and add to this list.

—Chip

I urge you to sign up for Chip’s daily dose of wisdom. It’s free, but you’ll feel richer reading his thoughts and those of his inspiring guest bloggers. Just write: wisdomwell@modernelderacademy.com and sign up. You’ll love it—every day!

Chapter Two

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE OLD?

"I don't care what Flaherty says—I am old."

How old?

"Well, sixty-seven. But isn't that old enough to be old?"

Golly damn. I know that's a dated phrase, but cut me a little slack, will you? I'm closer to ninety than eighty, and I'll cheer up my vocabulary with many literate cow plops now and then because they help me smile at myself.

Okay, let's all join hands, nod our heads in agreement, and speak an unquestionable truth: growing old sucks. Let's try some others: The

Golden Age—Hah! They’ve put me out to pasture. I’m not worth anything. I’d be better off dead.

Holey Moley! Jumpin’ Jehosaphat! If you ever said or thought any of those epitaphs, shame on you. Gosh, maybe they’re all true. Maybe you aren’t worth anything. Maybe you should just get your papers and investments and 401K in order and roll over and wait to die. And, certainly, don’t waste your time reading the rest of this book, which will only remind you of what a jerk you are. Come on, friends, sixty-seven is not old enough to be old. And speaking for myself, neither is eighty-seven.

You’re not old. It just seems time moves too quickly. Twenty years ago was last week. How does it happen? How can I, forever young Jim, be eighty-seven? I got here overnight. I am laughing at myself, knowing I refer to someone as “older,” meaning older than myself, but they’re not! They’re maybe seventy or seventy-five, but they seem “older.”

Just found a list titled, “The Joys of Being over 70.” Some of them are pretty funny, even accurate.

Not positive how they stack up with those of us over eighty?!

- Kidnappers aren't very interested in you.
- In a hostage situation, you'll probably be released first.
- No one expects you to run into a burning building. Or run anywhere.
- People call at 9 p.m. and ask, "Did I wake you?"
- No one calls you a hypochondriac anymore.
- Eventually, you'll remember why you walked into that room.
- There's nothing left to learn the hard way.
- Things you buy now—won't wear out.
- You can eat dinner at 4 p.m. (I do, between two and four every day).
- You have a party, and the neighbors didn't even notice.
- You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.
- You quit trying to hold your stomach in, no matter who walks into the room.

- You sing along with elevator music and only listen to Sinatra in your car.
- Your eyes (hopefully) won't get much worse.
- Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off. And you never dreamed Medicare would be a dream come true.
- Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.
- Your supply of brain cells is finally down to a manageable size.
- And you may not remember where you read this list.

“Old” is not a badge we wear courageously. “For old people,” Ursula K. Le Guin wrote in her book on aging, “Beauty doesn’t come free with the hormones, the way it does for the young. It has to do with who the person is.” Maybe aging is similar to how Michelangelo sculpted—he stripped the rock away to reveal David. What if our aging process is meant to reveal the beauty and soulfulness that has always been trapped inside us? Perhaps, if

we recognized, accepted, and *acknowledged* that our inner beauty becomes more vibrant as we age, fewer of us would worry about being old. That wonderful thought came from Chip Conley's beyond-intelligent Wisdom Well essays. He finished that by saying, "Unfortunately, most of us only see ourselves in comparison to those around us."

Yes, we shouldn't worry about being older. All those statements about being old are wrong. Here are some truths—with a smile.

- I am in the prime of senility.
- I'm not young enough to know everything.
- Many men die at twenty-five but aren't buried until they're seventy-five.
- If you don't wake up aching in many joints, you're probably dead.
- Old age means realizing you'll never own all the dogs you wanted to.
- Old age comes at a bad time.

Ignore all of that and go read a book. Lose twenty pounds. Stop smoking! You're drinking too much.

I know some of you all too well. And you're right. I'm shaking my head, disappointed, wondering what's going to happen to you.

While this book is mostly about mental health, about putting yourself out in the world, walking into the arena, showing up, there are other things you can be doing—no, let's make that *should* be doing—that cannot be ignored.

Doing *all* the right things for your health, not just following the advice from your doctor (and please do, don't ignore it), but also doing what you know are the right things to do for your body. Being an older age is not an excuse for letting your health go.

Don't you dare smoke! I mean, stop this minute. And if you're a smokeaholic, think about this: some doctors say every pack cuts your life by a week. Got it? Besides the desire to live longer, do you really want to spend that much money on something that can kill you?

Next? You don't care that you're a little more than plump. You're, face it, you're obese. Fat? Oh, that doesn't matter, you say, because sex or close

relationships don't matter anymore. Oh, deliver me from idiotic thinking. I don't care if you never get in bed with someone else for the rest of your life. I want you to feel better about yourself. If you're twenty pounds overweight or more, put your hand on your heart or on a Bible or agree with your mirror psychiatrist (whom you're going to meet later) that *you are going to lose that weight now!*

How do you do that? First, start by modifying your diet. You don't need bread with every meal (or any meal). Instead of mashed potatoes, puree some cauliflower. Learn how delicious salads and vegetables can be. Don't buy fried chicken. And certainly, *never* drink regular sodas. Diet sodas and the new seltzers are delicious—and have *zero* calories. Do I have to nag you about alcoholic drinks? You do know that alcohol turns to sugar in your system? When I stopped drinking, I lost twenty pounds overnight—and I wasn't trying to lose weight. Leave beer to college kids (who shouldn't drink that much at all).

Have you become that proverbial couch potato? I don't want to hear it. On your feet, now. If you

don't have an exercise machine in your house or a rug where you can lie down and exercise, then take a walk. Start moving every day. If it's not too pricey, join a gym and get a trainer to help you get the best use out of the machines or weights. Then when you have your physical at your doctor's office, they'll tell you your blood pressure is better and you've lost some weight. And your blood tests will come back healthier. Somehow, a good news report from the doctor is great news.

Also, friends, don't forget to take the vitamins and nutrients your body needs. Obviously, eating correctly solves some of that, but none of us are that disciplined about what we're putting in our mouths day after day. I just want you to start being very conscious of what and how you eat. It doesn't cost that much more to eat healthfully instead of destructively.

Look again at the title of this book: EMBRACE YOUR AGE. It's so much easier to do when you're healthy.

You're thinking, "Frog you, Flaherty" (no, I'm not making up a new French curse, just cleaning

up my tendency toward censorable language). I hear you say, “I’m not going to feel guilty having a Bloody Mary—no, 11:20 a.m. isn’t too early; it’s almost noon. And then we’ll have some lunch, leftover microwaved pizza, and maybe a glass of wine with that, then there’s a sports catchup show on cable, and we can have some chips and dips, and then, maybe a nap for a couple of hours, and then . . . well, I’m not sure, as I haven’t firmed up plans for wasting the late afternoon and evening.”

Just thinking about all that puts me in a coma. (Actually, I *fall* into a comma, because I’m a writer, but you get the idea.) I mean, you aren’t living. You’re just moving from one totally unproductive, unmeaningful event to another and, on the way, filling your gut with disposable, useless carbs and calories. And you’re going to wake up tomorrow looking forward to more of the same? Maybe I’ll become a creator of *Horror Films* and use you as the main character: the living dead. You’re flawless for the part. A better leading man or woman couldn’t exist. The problem with doing nothing is that you never know when you’re finished!

Here's a meaningful quote from Seneca the Younger, a statesman, philosopher, and dramatist, who lived till a very old age in Jesus's time—about sixty-nine: "It's not that we have a short time to live, but we waste much of it. Life is long enough, and it's given to us in generous measure for accomplishing the greatest things if the whole of it is well invested. But when life is squandered through soft and careless living, and when it's spent on no worthwhile pursuit, death finally presses on, and we realize that the life of which we didn't notice has passed away." In that same essay, he spoke of the incomparable value of time and how that value grows later in life, that it can be spent, invested, used, wasted, or donated—just like money.

And while you're thinking about Seneca's wisdom, which I hope and pray adds some eloquence to my personal beliefs and verbal wanderings, I want to mention someone else's book, which we'll talk about later. The book is titled *From Strength to Strength*, and the author is

someone I've put on a personal pedestal: Professor Arthur C. Brooks. I mentioned him in the previous chapter.

But first, while we're talking about age, read this wonderful short essay about ageism—something we're ALL guilty of promoting.

The following is another guest post from the aforementioned blog: *The Wisdom Well*. You'll love this, and I know you'll identify.

Guest Post: "Ageism Is an Inside Job."²

I'm ageist. There you go, I've said it. And though you may deny it, so too are you.

Ageism is inherent, it's in all of us. It runs deep in the fabric of society, transcending gender, race, and borders. It's a plague, and it's catastrophic. When it's "out there," on every street across the world, it's easy to identify. When it's inside our hearts and minds, it is not. But identify it we

2 - Reprinted with permission. George Jerijan, "Ageism Is an Inside Job," *Wisdom Well* (blog), Modern Elder Academy, April 7, 2022, <https://wisdomwell.modernelderacademy.com/ageism-is-an-inside-job>.

must—and more than that, we must challenge it.

How often have you heard yourself say “I’m too old to change,” or “I can’t do this anymore”?

This is internalized ageism and although we don’t realize it, we elders are more ageist than anyone else. We’re also less willing, or less able, to do anything about it. But do something about it, we must. Not on social media, in politics, law or in organizations—it’s already being fought on those fronts. Our job is to challenge it in ourselves, in our own minds.

“Why bother?” I hear you ask. “Is this a cause really worth fighting?”

Hell yes. Internalized ageism is poisonous. At its worst, deadly.

When we speak of ourselves as ‘old,’ ‘inferior,’ ‘past it,’ we become those things. Our words have power. Our thoughts impact our psyche and our behavior. They stop us from doing the things we were meant to do and living the life we were meant to live, simply because we believe we can’t.

How often have you looked in the mirror and recoiled at the image reflected? Gray hairs, wrinkles, and age spots are all signs of experience, of a life lived, but we're programmed to view these things in the most negative way. The loss of beauty, youth, and vitality . . . the dawn of deterioration and diminishment. We need to shift this mindset.

And then there's 'retirement' which is the driving force behind the development of ageism. For generations, the end of our working life has been hailed as the time we can do what we want, when we want, if we want, but when we get there, we're disappointed, because we find it an empty, lonely, and soulless place where we're besieged by health and financial worries. Here we fester as 'failures,' tiptoeing toward a quiet death, thinking there is no other way.

BUT THERE IS. If you challenge yourself to break free from this ageist mindset, the voice in your head which speaks those 'you are now worthless' thoughts, you can make the next

thirty years of your life, the best years yet. When we stop believing the ageist views inside us and start challenging the ageist views in society, we open ourselves up to a world of new possibilities. And we're in the right frame of mind to embrace them. In this 'new' world, age is seen through the lens of relevance, resilience, and wisdom. Life becomes rich once again. Our days are full of purpose, passion, and prosperity. George Jerijan is the author of *DARE to Discover Your Purpose* and founder of Retirement Rebellion—helping boomers live a life of passion, purpose, and prosperity. www.Georgejerijan.com.

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On my website, jamesbflaherty.com you'll find my email, talktome@jamesbflaherty.com and a telephone number. I'd love to hear from you.

XO, Jim

The End (Not mine, Not yet)