



The Big Six-Oh

By Eleanor Vincent

*“When you’ve been 59 for a year, you have two choices: turn 60 or die.
I’m still here at 60. I like that.”*

— Pat Sajak

Those turns of the odometer get your attention. You know what I’m talking about—the “decade” birthdays. Two decades ago when I told people I was 39, I felt like a character in a Jack Benny monologue. I always got a “wink-wink” or an “oh right, sure you are...” comment. At 59, it was different. I’ve never been one for hiding my age—I’m more inclined to brag about it. But when collecting Social Security morphs from far-fetched fantasy to a line item in your monthly budget, you know you’re getting up there.

I can report that I “crossed over” without incident. One Baby Boomer will turn 60 every second for the next 19 years. In all, 78 million of us. Many of the People magazine crowd have hit their 60s already, including George Bush, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Dolly Parton, and legions of rock ‘n roll singers from the 1960s.

My birthday falls on the same day and year (May 14, 1948) as the state of Israel. India had declared itself an independent nation the prior year, and the struggles of the Civil Rights movement in the United States hadn’t yet begun. Women’s liberation was a glimmer in Simone de Beauvoir’s synapses, and polio was still a scourge. The Mickey Mouse club hadn’t been invented yet. It’s amazing to live long enough to watch countries, social movements, pop fads, and diseases wax and wane.

I graduated from college in 1970, when finding a suitable husband was as much a motivation for being there as getting a good education for many of my female classmates. When I entered the fulltime work force that year, single working women pretty much expected they’d work for a few years, get married, and retire prematurely when their first child was born. On the cusp of a radical shift in the dreams and expectations of women, I leaped straight to the bleeding edge and never looked back. I’ve always worked, even when I had babies. Work is central to my identity. And yet work-life balance has never been more important to me than now.

More than 37% of a national sample of 60-year-olds interviewed by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) says they plan to work “until I drop.” Sounds mighty unappetizing to me, but I guess it depends on what they mean by “work.” If they mean continue the old grind in a cubicle for another 30 years, count me out. But maybe they mean write their novels, paint their pictures, start new ventures, or volunteer for their favorite causes. If that’s the vision, I am so there.

Bonnie Raitt’s song, “Scared to Run out of Time,” pretty much sums it up. I’ve never been more passionate about making the most of every moment. People ask how I feel about turning 60. Incredibly lucky. Mighty proud. And very shocked. Back when I was growing up in the turbulent 1960s, actually being 60 was considered old. I couldn’t even imagine living that long.

Some say 60 is the new 45. Possibly. What is certain is this: more than ever before, I feel renewed urgency to spend time with loved ones and friends, take that trip to Paris, get to Yoga class, and buckle down to finish my next book. Age clarifies and sharpens your priorities. And that’s a good thing. I’ll be celebrating this milestone for some time to come. I’ve earned it, and so has every other 3-score-year-old.

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