

The hammock between after and next

by BROCK WEIR

From a young age, I was always called an 'old soul'.

I don't know precisely where it came from, but there are more than a few suspect routes.

There was the love of classic films and television. Sure, I can see the connection ? but quality is quality.

There was the love of history, including smaller historical events that happened not all that long ago in the grand scheme of things. Interesting is interesting.

Of course, there was grandparent factor to whom my connection may have been little bit stronger than average. But family is family.

As I've raced ever closer to the age of my grandparents, while time has widened the gap between the events of yore and today, and as the inevitable march forward has bumped at least some of my favourite classics just a little bit further from the public consciousness, I realize that it isn't really a matter of being an old soul; rather, it's the realization I have a lot to learn.

We all have a lot to learn.

Brushing up on classic films and television can give you a great primer on the evolution of humour and the kinds of things that entertain us, not to mention a snapshot on the lives of trailblazing persons whose impact is still being felt today. Even the most seemingly mundane parts of our more recent history can influence where we are and where we're going.

Knowing, as they say, is half the battle.

The same can be said of my grandparents. That love of history gave me a passion for dredging up the past. No, not in a bad way, but in asking to hear certain stories more than once to get a handle on the persons that shaped them, took them by the shoulders and pointed them in a certain direction, helped them see things through a difference lens, not to mention the formative experiences like the Depression, the Second World War, and many more.

When you get down to it, all these factors played a hand in developing not only who they were, but who my parents are, and even who I am.

There is so much we can learn if we just listen to the people around us. It doesn't have to be the people who feature in these pages week after week, the prominent figures on our evening newscasts, or the ones who take up the most space on our social media feeds. It can be the person on the street, the person sitting across from you on the bus, or even on the other end of a cold call.

Knowing when to listen is also an important skill to have.

Last Wednesday, for instance, marked the 100th birthday of television pioneer Norman Lear.

The man who changed the face of the medium with such programs as *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times*, and most recently a revival of *One Day at a Time* on Netflix and other streaming services, is still in tip-top shape, still producing television, most recently alongside Jimmy Kimmel, and still engaging with people through media that hadn't even been contemplated when he was born in 1922.

As such, in the lead-up to his special day, he issued a series of thoughts over Facebook through videos shot by his daughter.

‘Holding this infinitely brilliant cellphone camera that is photographing me,’ said Lear, on the eve of his milestone, introducing his daughter. ‘My God, the miracle of being alive with everything that is available to us. Tomorrow, I turn 100 [and] that’s as believable to me as today being 99! I have been doing ‘Breakfast Thoughts’ [the name of his video messages] and I guess my breakfast thought at the moment is THE MOMENT. Every person who is seeing me now, some are seeing me within months of my saying this, some years after I said this, but whenever all of you are seeing it, that will be the moment you’re seeing it as this is the moment I am saying it. What it means to me is living in the moment: the moment between past and present, of present and past, the moments between after and next – the hammock between the middle of after and next. Treasure it [and] use it with love.’

Although these words were brief, I think we can all, regardless of age, take away a lot from this sentiment.

Despite his grand old age, Norman Lear strikes me as a ‘young soul’ and is very much living in the here and now – or, as he put it, ‘in the moment.’

He didn’t pack up and shuffle off into retirement after Archie Bunker downed his last beer or pointed his final raspberry in a character’s general direction. He didn’t hang up his iconic sailor hat when Bea Arthur uttered Maude’s last, ‘God’ll get you for that, Walter.’ Nor did he take the elevator down to the parking garage and drive off into the sunset after one ultimate trip to the Jeffersons’ ‘dee-luxe apartment in the sky.’

Instead, he’s kept on creating, embraced new innovations as they’ve come along, had the wherewithal to see how they could be used to his advantage, and continued to find the energy to fight for the causes that are still as near and dear to his heart as ever before.

The key to staying in the moment, age be damned, I think, is simply maintaining interest – and, in my observation, that seems to be a prime factor in Lear bucking what sometimes appears to be a trend amongst his generation.

My grandparents were in this category and, in many ways, for them there came a point in time where they hit an arbitrary age and decided they were suddenly ‘too old’ to stay up to date, that their need for technology and new channels for their interests and passions was set in aspic, that they absolutely HAD to slow down in order to smell the proverbial roses, and that was that.

On more than one occasion, when the subject of technology of any sort came up, my grandmother’s oft-repeated refrain was, ‘I was born 30 years too early.’

That wasn’t a fact, it was a concerted choice – to everybody’s detriment.

With advances we have made in medicine, care, and simply how interconnected we all are now, everyone, regardless of the date on as something as ephemeral as a birth certificate, has the potential to be a ‘young soul’ or at least embrace the young soul within.

In fact, it’s imperative.

In a recent chat I had with 98-year-old actress Carole Cook, who is now setting out to retool her one-woman cabaret show in time for her 100th birthday, she said to me, ‘The key is being ready when you’re lucky.’

Both she and Norman Lear are prime examples of this outlook on life. Lucky enough to have good health and a fine mind that defies age, they have been ready to embrace what luckily has come their way.

We all can learn from that.