



Age Old Questions

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When was the last time you said, "I used to do that, when I was younger"? Or how about, "I'm too old for that, now"? If you're over 25 or so, probably pretty recently, and probably many times, too. It seems these are phrases that are basically endemic to adulthood. How about telling someone, "You're too old for that"? Whenever you last said it, I'd bet it was to someone in their mid-20's, or 30's, or 40's, and it was probably in response to them doing something like trampolining or skateboarding. You know — kids' stuff.

It'll likely surprise no one that I have unconventional views on "age", even radical to the point of shocking, for some, but this post is about something recently brought to my attention for the first time. It's nothing earth-shattering, just a bit of insight into my mind that stems from a walk with a buddy, during which I eyed a picnic table (I know; "picnic table?"). Such a bizarre label for prison accoutrements! But what else can you call it?). I mentioned wanting to do more plyometric exercise and thinking "box jumps" onto the tabletop might be good; my co-walker looked at me like I'd grown a 4th arm. "You think you can just ~~jump~~ up there? What are you, sixteen?" Um... I dunno? See, I've done this countless times in the real world; ergo, it's a thing I can do. Q.E.D., right? My explanation failed to faze my doubting comrade, who counter-explained, "whatever. You were a lot younger when you did that before, right?" Sure, yeah... I guess. So what?

To be clear, I'm not stupid. Rust is real, and when I get onto a bike or tennis court ~~after~~ a long layoff, I know I'll need practice before I'm back up to par. I expect my body to say, "Oh! Ok! We haven't used these muscles in awhile!" But here, we're talking about hopping up 3 feet onto a table, not leaping tall buildings in a single bound. You don't have to be Superman, and I don't expect to need reacclimation to just... jumping. But for my friend, this isn't about "rust" or practice — it's about age, and well into his 30's now, age for him is far more than just a number. It's a personal identity, one which popular consensus allows him to presume is also universal. But it's not.

Ok, I admit I found his skepticism on this a little offensive and a lot absurd. Because I do like and respect him, our conversation evolved into a deeper philosophical exploration of the social construction and imposition of the "age" concept, which I'll mostly spare you (for another blog, maybe?), but what struck us both that day was the apparent oddity that I've simply never (yet) uttered the phrase, "I used to do that, when I was younger." The thought has just literally never occurred to me. He found this almost unbelievable, and of course, there ARE things I once did but do no more... eating bugs and wearing size 6 shoes come to mind. Obviously, these are things I necessarily did "when I was younger"; that's just how time apparently works. But this is NOT what's normally meant, nor understood, by that phrase, is it? No, when adults say "I used to do that when I was younger", they invariably mean they did it before, but now they are too old to do it anymore. In folks under 50, that's usually not true — they just suppose it's physically impossible now, or at least unwise to try. They think they might break a hip or, more likely, fall on their face. The way I see it, they just became afraid, and more often than not, they're afraid because they stop doing what they love by their late teens, dutifully trading in their passions ^{for the} materialist monetary that our collective delusion insists is "maturity". As a result, we come to embrace wage slavery under consumerist notions

of "adulthood," rushing off to work before we even finish school, sometimes (tragically) to survive, but quite often just to buy the things our culture says we're supposed to own (or lease, or merely possess) in order to be accepted into the ranks of "respectable" grown-ups... a birthright with a price tag, both economic and social. So we stop playing (it's childish!), and very soon, far faster than anyone imagines it happening, we no longer do what we "did when we were young." Even worse, we soon see the few weirdos who try to regain their joy (or the even fewer, even wackier ones who managed to retain it all along) as not only outliers, but even as outlaws — reckless and literally crazy, a threat to the established order of drudgery.

I took a break, then re-read what I've written so far... I don't love it. This paper is too rare for me to throw it away, though! Lol. Anyway, as poorly written and poorly thought out as it is, it still touches on some points I feel are important. Basically, plenty of people might say I'm ridiculous for doing what I've always done, for "not growing up," and I suppose that's ok. For whatever reason, I just don't share most people's obsession with rushing toward death; I figure I'll just get to it in my own time, thanks.

Incidentally, this sort of anarchist, anti-capitalist critique of "when I was younger" leaves out what I think may be the more important, youth-rights perspective. For one thing, I've assumed that people get older and give up doing what they used to do, but maybe even more often, people self-servingly tell themselves and others that they would and could do X "when they were younger," but... nope! In fact, whatever it is they're pre-emptively tapping out on as excuse-making adults, they ~~wouldn't~~ ^{probably} couldn't do when they were lying little kids, either. It's a pitiful form of self-aggrandizement, and it comes at the expense of the young whenever it's correlated with the insane adult delusion that youth is a time of vaguely superhuman capacity. I can't count the people I know today who seem genuinely unable to ~~remember~~ ever getting tired or sore or tweaking a joint before they were 20. These types say things (as someone close to me once said, when I was 14 and had a couple bad crashes during a motocross race) ^{like,} "He's ok — he's at that rubbery age." AS IF I could just bounce harmlessly off of rocks!

Sorry — other than maybe early infancy, there is no "rubbery age." Young bodies break and get sore, too, and any adolescent who sprints hard will be out of breath at the end, same as any adult. It's offensive and even harmful to pretend young people are somehow beyond physical limitation — Who can live up to that? — and I wish these mendacious, uncoordinated old potato people would stop mythologizing youth to prop up their rickety self esteem through revisionist histories that make themselves into the heroes they never were.

Quit using getting older as an excuse; ~~and~~ ^{and quit using} lost (or forfeit) youth as a scapegoat.