

AGING - A PROCESS THAT STARTS AT BIRTH, DETERMINED BY DIET, LIFESTYLE, AND MADE LIVABLE BY PERSONAL AWARENESS, ATTENTION & ATTITUDE

The perspective of Charles (Chuck) Maack, 86 years of age December 11th, 2018.

I am going to provide the history of my life as I grew and aged so that readers can recognize where “life” and “aging” has taken me to my current age. Without such recognition my perspective of aging and requirements of survival may not make much sense.

Am I unusual in how my life has unfolded? I was born in Oshkosh (B’Gosh) Wisconsin in 1932 and shortly thereafter my father pretty much “skipped town” leaving my Mom and I virtually penniless. I learned only 30 years later when finally meeting him in Portland, Oregon while my family and I were enroute from Navy duty in Hawaii to a new assignment on Kodiak Island, Alaska, with his remark that as a young man only 21, he was worried having to now take care of his wife and child and, apparently, jobless. So, he just took off and joined a couple brothers mining in the mountains of Pony, Montana and never looked back. That was his excuse for leaving us, and I had little to say other than accept his side of the story. Unfortunately for him while involved in the mining, a dynamite blast blew gravel through the air and into his face that he became permanently blind. He had met another woman in Pony who eventually became his wife and cared for him. The good fortune for him was that he was enrolled in physical therapy/massage therapy in Portland, Oregon, and became a licensed massage therapist starting his own business out of his home with his subsequent life moderately wealthy. My Mom and I were never provided child support and lived a pretty “poor in money” life.

Though I felt I ate reasonably, I likely did not receive the necessary diet and nourishment needed because I was always a skinny kid, though not overly sickly.

I didn't even realize while growing up in Oshkosh through the Great Depression that started just before my birth and with some bounces in economy never recovered until after World War II, what it meant to be poor other than knowing every penny was important (to this day I will pick up any penny I see on the ground). Fortunately, our neighborhood was filled with other children around my same age and who, despite having fathers, were not wealthy and whose families lived from pay day to pay day. We all played together, laughed together, fought with each other, and cried together, but all-in-all were close knit and at least comfortable with each other. As soon as able despite being very young, I found jobs to help earn money and be able to buy my own clothing and inexpensive necessities. My first "injury" occurred round 12 years of age when I flipped over my bicycle and landed on my face, breaking my nose! Fixed by a doctor with a spoon on one side and his thumb on the other with one "crack" back into place. A difficult period in those years followed my Mom marrying a man who turned out to be a mean drunk following every pay day. He abused both my Mom and I and if there was ever a reason to hate someone, that occurred with me though I dislike the word "hate." I saw my future as bleak and as soon as I turned 17 years of age in 1949 I enlisted in the Navy. Fortunately, some years later my Mom divorced this man and lived a reasonably comfortable life until her death at age 96.

And that leads to the rest of my story as I began the growing, maturing, and aging process. Having enlisted in the Navy and entering a world far from that I had previously experienced turned out to have been the best decision of my life. As I mentioned earlier, I was a skinny kid, and being so I was aware of my difference in stature than most of my shipmates. That was made more evident when, during a military inspection by the Commanding Officer in Trinidad, British West Indies, he made the remark in front of all my shipmates, "why are you so skinny, are you ill?" Somewhat embarrassing but looking back I think that remark was the beginning of my forging an attitude of confidence in myself to accept ridicule, if merited, and do something about it. *My first health issue also occurred there in 1951 when my right lung collapsed.*

I expect my “skinny” and smoking too many cigarettes bought me to this first health lesson learned (well, not quite “learned” as you will read later)! I admit to living a somewhat wild lifestyle during those first couple years in the Navy that certainly would not be considered good for my health and likely detrimental to my aging process if not changed.

That initial enlistment turned into a Naval career when I realized I was making something of myself as an individual and advancing in my specialty at a more than anticipated rate. My marriage to AnnaBelle Perlog of Canton, Ohio shortly after my re-enlistment for another four years certainly made a continued difference in my well-being as well as confidence in myself to now be a loving/caring husband and subsequently father (better yet, Dad!) to our eventual four children. During our first Navy assignment together on Guam, on May 15, 1955 (I remember the day clearly!) I experienced *my second health issue* when a severe flash of pain across my chest caused me to drop to the floor. I thought I was having a heart attack at only 22 years of age! Turns out that my foolishness in returning to smoking following the lung collapse four years earlier had weakened that same lung! Fortunately, and with this wake-up call and for certain stopping smoking, the problem resolved with no further such issues. Now married and my wife serving regular, nourishing meals, I began a more appropriate diet and lifestyle and a regular weight gaining process for my 6’1” medium to large frame to an eventual 225 lbs.

My confidence grew as I continued to advance in my Navy specialty and the support of my wife. Having never involved myself in sports, I began training in the martial art and sport of Kodokan Judo in 1961 at 28 years of age while stationed in Hawaii, and by this time, and the nourishment my wife had provided me in realistic eating habits, and by engaging in this physical activity, I had developed into a relatively strong, muscular “heavyweight” in this new endeavor, such that I was the Navy’s Hawaiian Area Heavyweight Judo Champion in 1962.

The career in the Navy was good for me and our family as I continued to advance ultimately to the top of the enlisted rating – Master Chief Cryptologic Technician with collateral duty near the end of my career as senior enlisted Command Master Chief. My aging process became a bit more evident in 1973 at the age of 40 while stationed in London, England when I experienced *my third health issue* of severe prostatitis with side effects of hallucinations and extreme illness while the physician was treating me for what he thought was influenza. By the time the prostatitis was determined after almost a month, I had lost thirty pounds and though a cardiologist said my heart sac had slight damage, it was not threatening.

When that Navy career came to its eventual close, I/we moved to what we in the military call “civilian” life.

That “civilian” life continued to be supportive to our family along with the benefits of continued military retirement income and life-long health coverage.

But over these years I was aging in years and *my fourth health issue and first major health issue* in that civilian life hit me at just turning 60 years of age with the diagnosis of Prostate Cancer, a “men’s” disease that some survive with early eradication of the cancer, too many die because that cancer has already metastasized throughout their body, yet others – as was my case – continued to survive despite our cancer recurring following initial treatment of surgical removal of the prostate gland, or radiation to the prostate gland and its periphery, or, as in my case, both. That continued survival for me meant moving to a variety of medications, some toxic to the system, not expected to cure, but rather considered “palliative” care to prolong our lives. And over these many years treating my prostate cancer, imaging at various times to determine if my cancer had metastasized indicated it apparently had not; yet if I stopped medications my PSA blood level would elevate indicating cancer activity “somewhere.” The imaging did determine *my fifth health issue* of degeneration in the spine, a slipped disc (required shaving of

disc between L4 and L5 vertebrae to clear disc from spinal nerves that had been causing severe pain down the spine and buttocks into upper thighs), as well as degeneration present in knees, hips, and in several areas as expected from aging.

I learned that my father and his brothers had all experienced prostate cancer, though apparently caught early on and, as far as I know, not the cause of eventual demise in their 90s; it is well known that with prostate cancer in the family, the likelihood of being diagnosed is increased.

And thus, in my case, began the REAL process of continued aging while intent on “living.”

“Life” depends on what we, as individuals, choose to make of it. We must pay attention to our diet and lifestyle. We are all destined to die at a time, I believe, has been pre-determined by my/our God. If we can accept that destiny yet take charge of our lives heading to that destiny, we can make it through life’s obstacles and issues of health much more comfortably enjoying every day that continues to that end. I have learned that is very important that we look at life’s challenges as something to come upon, then do whatever necessary to make what has occurred “livable.” We should always have this positive attitude since it will carry us through what may be hard times back to at least reasonable times, and hopefully for many, the former “good” times.

Very importantly, we must do everything possible to avoid depression. That could mean recognizing a “down” feeling and doing something about it early on either by seeing a physician or taking time to research and recognize what “depression” is all about, or better - both.

Depression has a physical effect in our system by igniting stress hormones that can then cause or magnify any number of health issues. Every one of us is capable to do something about depression. It has become my opinion that with determination to fight the onset of depression by immediately attacking the reason for the developing depression, either in discussion with family or close friends, if religious

with your minister, priest, or rabbi, with your family physician, or possibly better yet, a Psychiatrist, you can combat this effect. Many remark “Psychiatrist?!” and are prone to ignore such an idea. The medical profession of psychiatry has evolved because of its very important necessity! These professionals, in company with Psychologists, work wonders in solving the worries and concerns of people experiencing difficulties that have led them to depression.

If you are not engaged in some form of activity or volunteer project, get involved! Being mentally as well as physically involved in outside activities takes your mind off likely trivial concerns that otherwise dwell in your mind and can cause depression. Helping others, even by just “being there,” provides a sense of pride and worthiness that uplifts your well-being. This reference provides a comprehensive explanation of the effects of depression in your system: <https://tinyurl.com/yc73fqdf>

What you have read to now pretty much explains why, despite obstacles faced in life and in health, I have continued to this current age of 86 years. I have experienced the discomfort of cancer and its, so far, 26 years of treatment. I have experienced because of cancer and the medications necessary in its treatment, the loss of muscle, strength, frailty, weakness, fatigue and the decline in bone and joints that also come with aging. *I have experienced other serious health issues including (sixth) squamous cell cancer to the right side of my face that required an Otolaryngologist with experience in the nerves running down that area to provide the surgical removal of that somewhat large “lump” that had developed; fortunately, totally cleaned out. Also, (seventh & eighth) pulmonary embolism (blood clotting) blocking both lungs simultaneously on two separate occasions that I consider “by the Grace of my God” I survived since these are life-threatening issues and many do not survive even a first such blockage. I have experienced (ninth and tenth) the loss of feeling in my left hand and lower arm along with confusion and slurring speech that required trips to the ER, also on two separate occasions, and since having subsided within hours apparently (thankfully) ruled out as “stroke.” But still I have survived!*

Why? Because throughout my life I have always maintained a positive attitude about “life” that I maintain has absolutely made a difference in my longevity on this earth! We ALL can survive beyond our expectations if we adopt this attitude and set our minds to “living” each day as close as we can to those good days that occurred through most of our lives. Give thanks for yesterday and today, and pray that tomorrow you will still wake up to yet another day with family who need your presence in their lives! Never look at yourself as no longer needed in life; your children and their children and their children all look up to you and the need for your presence in their lives. You are not alone!

Experience an issue of any kind? Meet it head-on and do something about it. You can either remedy by attacking it or, if it becomes necessary, make it a point to accept and “live” with what may come with it. If you do so, your continued “life” and the aging process that brings with it “issues,” can be much easier to live with than permit leading you to depression and likely an earlier time to your demise.

My hope for readers is that I may have provided you reason to look at your own lives, obstacles, and health issues in a manner in which you recognize how you can now meet these issues more confident that by being proactive in looking after yourselves you, too, may live longer lives enjoying each day given you. I have always looked to the proverb “You Reap What You Sow” as important to recognize. It means what you do will affect your life. Living a life that includes love, caring, and respect - and extending the same to others - goodness and rewards will come your way. If you are mean, nasty, bitter, and extend that towards others, you can expect the negative attention coming your way; PLEASE, live the former!