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NOV



How Old Am I?

GENERAL/COLUMN ONE RESPONSE

"There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love." Sophia Loren

"How old do you feel, Grandma?" My pre-teen granddaughter and I had been talking about the difference between the way older people feel and the way they look. It took me a while to answer. "Somewhere in my 50s," I replied, though I'm decades older. The point is: I act my age but I don't feel it. At times I feel like a little girl, other times like a prime of life grown-up. There are times when my body can't keep up with my spirit.

Swinging side by side with a grandchild at the playground, rolling down a grassy hill, planning an April Fool's Day prank – none of these is beneath my dignity. In fact, I want to crow that the fun doesn't stop when your just one candle tops your birthday cake to avoid a fire hazard. On silver *and* golden anniversaries, when I don't feel as old as I look, it's confusing. I often wonder, how old am I?

"Mom, are you planning to drive to the retreat? Maybe you should take the train. There might be heavy traffic." Ah, the little role reversals that come with age – when your middle-aged children chime in on whatever you're up to. The shift caught me by surprise when it started. After my husband died, it went from an occasional "Want my two cents?" to a steady flow of advice from all of them, always well-meaning and

helpful. But I'm the one who pinned their mittens to their snowsuits and warned them not to step in puddles. Guess I set a great example. They care.

When my mom was the age I am now, she was widowed, too. Unlike me, she was on her own for the first time in her life. From across the miles I kept an eye out for ways to support her vibrant, life-loving lifestyle. Now my kids are doing that for me. That's hard to wrap my head around. Sure, I want them to weigh in on weighty decisions. And yes, I rely on their recipes when I'm off to a potluck. I love their tips about new apps (WAZE is my favorite; love those shortcuts when the highway's jammed). But I manage my finances and maintain my house, yard and car, while living the life I choose and gobbling up new experiences. I rose to the challenge when the basement flooded, and held my ground when Mother Nature pulled off her devilish new trick, a Derecho, the history-making storm system that cut off my power for seven 100-degree days. Sure, I welcomed my kids' suggestions about how to cope. But I'm the one that did the coping!

How old am I? The jury's out. Old enough to tell my grandchildren stories so they'll "meet" the family who came before them and learn about my life, too. I want them to know me as a whole person who happens – and is thrilled – to be their grandma. I wish I'd known my grandparents that way. And curious enough to never stop wondering how things work. One day as my granddaughter and I were web-surfing I exclaimed, "I love Google!"

Surprised by my outburst, she asked, "Why, Grandma?"

"Because I have a million questions about everything."

"I love you so much!" she giggled, as she gave me a hug.

When the two of us went to Ellis Island, the little girl in me was shouting "Oh, Goodie!" as we boarded the ferry. But as we set foot in that hallowed place, the matriarch I'm becoming felt profoundly blessed to share this generation-spanning experience with my daughter's daughter. As I looked at her fresh, freckled, soon to be a teenager's face, I understood: I may not know how old I am, but I know that she's the one who'll write the next chapter of our family's story.

*Always asking, "What's next?" Solo, sassy **Barbara Rady Kazdan** loves back roads travel*

and forward thinking. Find this empty nester enjoying close friends and her shaggy sheepdog in Silver Spring, Maryland, en route to far-flung family, and online at <http://www.achievingchangetogether.com/published-essays.php> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/barbarakazdan?trk=hp-identity-name>.

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NOVEMBER 28, 2016 AT 5:51 PM

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