

# Polanki, Inc.

Polish Women's Cultural Club Newsletter

Summer 2017

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## Tour of the Basilica

The tour of the Basilica will be on Friday, July 28, at 2:00 p.m. It should last about an hour. We need to let the Basilica know how many people will be attending. The deadline to RSVP for the tour is July 20. Seeing the area where the stain glass window that Polanki is paying for requires going up some carpeted stairs, but members can make a judgment as to whether they will go up the stairs to the choir loft. The building is otherwise handicap accessible as there is an elevator to get to the lower level to see the chapel and gift shop. The group will meet in the John Paul II Pavilion for the tour. Parking, including handicap parking, is available in the 7th Street lot.

If you are planning to attend, call or email Denna [daflemming@msn.com](mailto:daflemming@msn.com).



7/04	Elzbieta Walentynowicz
7/10	Adrian Zuber
7/14	Eva Melenchuk
7/20	Kim Swedowski
7/26	Ann Lalasz
7/28	Katherine Ott
7/30	Laurie Ufnowski
8/01	Elizabeth Wagner
8/02	Joanna Gibelev
8/05	Barbara Rutkowski
8/06	Loretta Nyland
8/08	Janine Adamczyk Kathy Camacho

## Get Well Wishes to

Active member Judy Chattin who will be having breast surgery and knee surgery;

8/10	Dolores Winkler Christine Ostrowski
8/13	Barbara Spalda
8/17	Katherine Ociepa
8/19	Louise Cieslak
8/25	Bernie Jendrzeczak
8/31	Susan Mikoś

Active member Elaine Posard who had a mastectomy;

Active member Carol Powers who had surgery on the second leg May 23; and

Sustaining member Elżbieta Walentynowicz whose cancer returned to the brain.



## We All Have to Own the Past

by John Gurda  
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Sunday, June 4, 2017

I'll turn 70 in a few days. A notable birthday, and I know what you're thinking: This guy is undeniably, certifiably old. Any chances he had of retiring early or dying young are long gone. True enough but, in case you haven't crossed it yet, allow me to file a brief report from the other side of the age line.

How am I feeling? A little dazed, thank you. Every so often, I look around and wonder how I got here, landed on a foreign shore that once seemed impossibly distant. At the same time, reaching 70 is the easiest thing I've ever done. You draw breath, take nourishment, read the paper and, suddenly, here you are, a newly minted septuagenarian. A line from Paul Simon's "Old Friends" sums it up: "How terribly strange to be 70." Simon recorded the song at the age of 26. He's now 75 and presumably feeling even stranger.

Old age may be odd, but it's not all negative. I always told my kids that every age has its good and bad sides, and that's no less true of 70 than it was of 40 or 4. The physical side would have to be in the minus column. For most guys, the breeding plumage is pretty well shot by now, gone to gray or gone entirely. Joints creak, the plumbing is suspect, and your feet develop strange shapes after keeping you upright for so many years. And all those changes occur if you're in good health; never mind the million more serious things that can, and frequently do, go wrong. The simple fact is that we all have front-row seats at the spectacle of our own deterioration.

An old friend from high school, Steve Larson, has a rule worth sharing. When he and his buddies get together, they have 15 minutes, all told, to discuss their aches and pains; after that the subject has to change. I find myself invoking the Larson Rule—or wishing I could—more and more often these days.

Not surprisingly, our physical decline has its mental and emotional corollaries. Capacity, stamina and resilience all take a hit as we age. We need more time to do things, more time between tasks and more time to recover. In a neat proportional adjustment, our desire to do large things seems to diminish with our capacity. I don't have the slightest interest in retiring but the prospect of writing another 500-page book seems about as remote as doing 50 pushups or running a five-minute mile.

Some of my peers find it easy to deny or at least ignore their approaching senescence. Age is just a number, they say. Seventy is the new 50. That strikes me as a psychological comb-over: We've reached authentic old age. If 70 is the new 50, dead must be the new 80.

But there's a plus side to aging as well. We septuagenarians have reached an undeniable sweet spot. If we've been lucky, provident, or both. We have plenty of time, enough money, and the ability and inclination

to use both. Within limits that become obvious, we can do whatever we want: travel, read, take classes, bike, bird-watch, go to concerts, or take a day game at Miller Park. The window may be narrow—we know what comes next—but it's a really nice window.

Social Security is an obvious help. After 44 years of 1099s—the title of my never-to-be-written memoir—I have a guaranteed income for the first time in my life, and without having to work for it. Or at least it feels that way. The truth is that I've already worked for it. Self-employed taxpayers pay effectively double what wage and salary workers put into the system. It's going to take me a long time just to get back what I paid in, but the monthly direct deposit still feels good. Not that it's enough to live on. I'm still working, but I've entered my squirrel years, when I, with everyone else in the pensionless class, have to start eating whatever corn I've stored away on my own.

In addition to greater financial security, there are certain permissions that come with age, among them a growing disregard for appearance. I take an oddly perverse pride in having made it to 70 without once working in food service or wearing a tuxedo. Those are resolutions I'm likely to keep, and I have almost certainly bought my last suit. I agree with Charlie McNeer, the former CEO of WE Energies, who said when he retired that he wanted his entire wardrobe to come from Farm & Fleet.

But what I like best about my age may be a newly discovered sense of owning the past. Whatever you've done, your life—your entire life—is your single greatest accomplishment. At 70, you can feel the weight and heft of it, the homeward bend of the arc as you enter the final stretch. You own every nick, scratch and heartache, every wrong turn and right decision. What poet Theodore Roethke called “the pure serene of memory in one man” becomes more and more tangible each year.

Owning the past has a somewhat literal meaning in my case. I've been studying Milwaukee's history since I was in my 20s. When I showed up to give a talk in the early days, people would ask when the historian was coming. No one has asked me that question in decades; in a way, I've caught up with myself. What's happened in between is a career, one that's been more absorbing and more rewarding than any two writers could hope to have, and I don't take my good luck lightly.

But owning the past applies to us collectively as well. Every generation inhabits a particular slice of time whose shape becomes clear by 70. Just as my parents remembered ice men and steam trains and FDR, I'm old enough to recall rag men and trackless trolleys and JFK—not to mention the 1957 World Series. But the story of my generation is inextricably linked with the rise of American popular culture. We baby boomers—an odd term for today's senior citizens—were raised on transistor radios, TV, rock and roll, Flower Power, Vietnam and Watergate. We have a common cultural memory, one that's infinitely more cohesive and much easier to share than the atomized environment of today. Like all generations, we've seen a lot, and like all generations, what we've seen has helped us weather the storms of the recent past. There is no substitute for time, no stand-in for experience. Our age equals our equity in the world.

As the past becomes clearer, the Big Questions seem bigger, particularly the ones about our ultimate future. At 70, however, you realize that the answers are unlikely to be any clearer than they are right now. (You also conclude that the tall figures of your youth were just as clueless as you.) It's damnably hard to remember at times when my brain craves certainty, but my own mantra is pretty simple: Do your work. Love your family. Walk in mystery.

Aging, like birthing, is a largely involuntary and completely irreversible process. It's a condition you can't help catching. There's no vaccine, no dietary supplement, no elixir that can halt the onrushing years. To the extent that you can distance yourself from your ongoing decay, it's important not to take the process too personally. Decline is built into the organism. It would be wholly unnatural for it not to occur, and it occurs, at varying rates of speed, for all of us. The young become old and the old leave the scene, as inevitably and organically as the sun sets and the moon rises.

Successful aging, then, is a matter of adjusting our mental expectations to our physical limitations without undue resistance. And remembering that there's always more out there. "Old men ought to be explorers," wrote T.S. Eliot, and I intend to follow his advice as best I can. Stay in the game, Eliot says; resignation, self-satisfaction, idleness are the wrong responses. There are still things of moment over the horizon. In the meantime, I offer a prayer for those joining me on the far side of 70 and for all those who already have made it.

I thank thee, Lord, for my good right knee,  
and all the times I've found my keys,  
for grandkids to spoil in late December  
and every name I still remember.  
Give me more days when I can sleep past seven  
and one or two nights when I'm up till eleven.  
Keep me from fear, shield me from doubt,  
and help me go with grace when the lights go out.

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