

84 (2014)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner on WLRH, Huntsville, AL USA

Being 84 is a challenge.

Someone said aging is like having a second job, and I resonate with that. My zany Aunt Gina used to entertain us youngsters every morning by lining up her pills like colored cars on the freight train, then popping them into the tunnel ... and now I am one, twice a day!

Others have pointed out that growing old is a reversal of the steps of being young, and that's true: first you learn to talk, and toward the end you forget how. First you learn to walk, and later on you totter. First you learn the names, and then you have them "right here on the tip of my tongue," but you draw a blank about "What's the word for that." Youth is the time of acquiring and accumulating; advancing maturity is time for unloading.

We're moving to a retirement residence before long. We don't really look forward to it, the institutionalization and the routine and the limitations, and we really like being free to do what we want to do when we want to do it, in our nice, quiet condo. But it's time; it's time for simpler and safer, with speedier access to various forms of assistance... and no stairs!

I've learned to call this "bonus time." When I call it "Sudden Death Overtime," it makes people flinch.

But I will have to mention one unexpected slice of life that's coming, one more reversal of the steps of childhood. That's how real and meaningful the old prayer has become. Remember? — "Now I lay me down to sleep..." —Remember? "...if I should die before I wake..." it will be okay.