

Last Time (2011)

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

It's hard when you know you're seeing someone you love for the last time.

I got to do that with my college roommate some years back, and I still remember the frail hug when we said to each other, "See you on the other side of the River!" We both knew he couldn't get well.

More recently, it's more iffy, less certain, when you just don't know if you'll get back to a certain place, after you cross the eighth-decade dateline and stop buying green bananas!

You see things differently. The flowers bloom prettier; the clouds puff fluffier; the scenery looks more postcardish. Regional specialty foods are tastier: maybe this is the last bowl of green chili, the ultimate Philly cheesesteak, or the last dish of collard greens, with those little nubs of bacon.

Of course it's more acute with people. Look carefully at that teenager: will you get to see her graduate? Listen hard to the babble of that toddler; try extra hard to teach him your name. Be sure to say, "I love you" several times. Try to say it exactly right this time, so they know you're sincere, and not just repeating empty words. Listen hard: don't just wait until that other mouth stops moving to get your opinion registered. And look hard, too, to memorize those precious faces, especially the ones with those character-lines inscribed so deeply. And remember what the experiences were that you shared to carve those lines through the decades.

Last train trip. Last airplane flight. Last Broadway play; last football game. Last sunset; last sunrise ... whatever. Don't squander those times; use them up, wring them out, sip every drop down to the bottom of the flagon: you may not pass this way again, and you'll need to remember for a very long time.

The Bible sets 70 as the target age; if you make it there you can consider that you didn't get short-changed. It's bonus time; so this is the time that gives new meaning to the phrase, "Sudden Death Overtime."

Savor!