

YES, I'M AGING. SO WHAT? IRIS DORBIAN



have a dire confession to make: I'm aging.

Yes, indeed. The ravages of time are absolutely, categorically and unequivocally rearing themselves on my face, hair and body. And no matter how often I dye the grey out of my hair, fill the marionette lines around my lips with Juvederm or cover my increasingly wizened neck with a scarf or turtleneck, the cosmetic conceits soon ebb, revealed to be the transitory fixes they truly are.

Honestly, I had no huge issue about aging—that is, until I was recently on the receiving end of a loaded question, which could have been innocuous (although I didn't take it as such as the time it was posed to me) and a remark that clearly wasn't. I thought as long as I took care of myself, aging would be a breeze. Maybe I'd be lucky and no one would notice. Ha!

The first instance came when a former male co-worker/friend whom I hadn't seen in a few years asked me point blank in a text the day after we met over coffee how old I was. I was baffled by the question considering I had known him for a long while and thought he probably knew. When I tried to joke my way out of it, he persisted, even approximating an age that he thought I probably was.

His conjecture was correct.

"I thought so," he texted back, when I finally admitted that I was most definitely eligible to join AARP. Radio silence on his part descended afterwards. (FYI, he's only a few years younger than I.)

What made his question about my age especially hurtful, even if he hadn't intended to fire a verbal dart at me, was that prior to my seeing him I had just come from my graduate school reunion, feeling really good about myself. Not only did I reconnect with a few old classmates but I was looking especially pulled together. Or so I thought.

My hair, newly re-touched and perfectly blown dried, had not a grey in sight. The nascent lines that were starting to groove around my mouth had been temporarily banished thanks to cosmetic fillers. My teeth were whitened due to dental bleaching and the flurry of whiteheads that dotted my

forehead, as well as a nasty little wart near the bridge of my nose, were obliterated courtesy of the skillful local dermatologist. I was prepared to go to my reunion and impress.

I basked in that afterglow; then my erstwhile associate threw that question, like a cyber-gauntlet, at me. Throwing down my iPhone, I felt humiliated, my ego flattened into smithereens. So much for all that tweaking to keep the obvious signs of aging at bay.

But even if I am aging, which, of course, I am, so what? It's not like I committed a cardinal offense. I didn't murder or molest anyone. I'm just getting older. You would think, having had friends who died young (and relatives whose lives were cut short in the Holocaust) that some might consider the act of getting older to be a gift. I guess not.

Another instance that for me highlighted the disdain our culture, especially women, have about aging, was when a friend of my mother's, who is notorious for speaking without any filter, reprimanded me for "looking really old." And because of this unacceptable breach, I had lost my looks, she added.

The catalyst for her outburst was my slim frame (which I've had most of my life) and which she felt was the root cause of my appearing Jurassic. (Incidentally, the woman is older than me and about 50 pounds heavier.) Infuriated by her flagrant lack of couth and sensitivity, I let her have it and have not spoken to her since.

Later on, I wondered, was it really my slightness that set off the proverbial mean girl in my mother's friend? Or is it because I'm obviously aging and in seeing that in me, someone who is younger than her, she is only too sadly and odiously reminded that time won't pass her by either?

The aversion we have to aging is an unfortunate corollary to our singular obsession with youth. Seriously, do we really want to be 21 forever? When I was that age, my daily almanac was comprised of unending bad decisions made in the full flush of callow ignorance. Clearly youth is overrated.

Oh sure, there wasn't a crease on my face or any pestilent grey growing unimpeded in my hair. Plus, my ability to stay up until 5 a.m. every day was unparalleled.

Yet I was also very unwise and ignorant when it came to functioning like a responsible, sensible adult. Now I'm not. Why is experience-based wisdom considered so expendable when juxtaposed with glossily youthful stupidity? Is it because as we get older we get closer to another taboo—death? I think so.

Bette Davis once said getting older isn't for sissies. She was right but that adage doesn't make it any easier when confronted with age bullies.

Similarly, my grandmother used to say (translated from Yiddish): "If you don't want to get older, hang yourself when you're young."

No one is immune to the effects of Mother Time. Consider it a present for having lived a few decades and give me a break. Let me age in peace.

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Iris Dorian is a business journalist/blogger who resides in the greater New York City area. Her articles have appeared in a wide variety of outlets that include the Wall Street

Journal, Reuters, CFO.com, DMNews, Media Industry Newsletter and Playbill. She is the author of "Great Producers: Visionaries of the American Theater" (Allworth Press/Skyhorse).