Forever Young: Blessing or Curse?

Jessica Klatt

PHI 329

Siena Heights University

February 19, 2020

One of my favorite memories growing up was with my grandma. For a class assignment in approximately sixth grade, we were to discuss changes that our elders had witnessed during their lifetime. Our assignment was then to take the information we obtained from our elders and discuss the history of technology. Ironically enough, this was still before computers were a commonplace element in every home. Even in school we learned typing on typewriters, not computers, and it wasn’t until late in junior high when, as a district, we began to see a *single* *computer* *classroom* in each building filled with 15-20 MacIntosh computers sporting a 5-¼” floppy drive bay. Can you even imagine what stories a person could tell if they could live eternally in a young body?

Visiting with my grandma was not an uncommon event, but the opportunity to talk in depth about her life beyond being “my grandma” was. She began with expressing how two pivotal technologies changed America in her lifetime; the telephone and the television. At the young age of around 12, I had never lived without these amenities. Who knew one day I would have both of these things on a small, portable device I kept mostly in my pocket, or that asking kids to dial a phone number on a rotary phone would be the next internet video sensation.

Thinking about this past assignment as it relates to my lifetime, I think about how prevalent computers have become. Computers have been the main technological advancement in my lifetime, but have led the way to video game systems, internet, cell phones and smartwatches, to name only a few, and I have not even hit 40 years yet. Who knows what the remainder of my life will uncover. It is no surprise that I have developed a wild fascination with technology. Growing up I begged and pleaded with my parents for a computer - I had no idea the cost at the time, I just knew we were one of the last families on the block to have one. A few years after the arrival of our Tandy personal computer, complete with black and white dot matrix printer and a whopping 4-MB hard drive, my plea became a new one for the internet. My world quickly became a tiny speck in reference to the vast reaches of AOL, email, and instant messaging - and so began the time of infinite knowledge. Today, the internet has changed how we do business and keep in touch with family. Each year companies like Apple pitch their new products, packed full of fancy features such as facial recognition making what was science fiction, in many ways a reality. While all of the potential in this arena is mind-blowing, I don’t know that, given the opportunity, I would want to live forever to witness more than I am organically supposed to.

My past is also filled with a lot of family time and great memories growing up that are separate from the technological advancements. The younger “me” might not have bargained in this way, but the older “me” would give up the technology for more time with family. My grandparents, I am very fortunate to report, are still around, pushing into their mid-90s. Their home still stands and was one that I spent every Sunday afternoon in. In the summertime, all of the cousins transformed into fish while visiting their pool. Spring break was spent at their winter home in Florida, where my sister and I would chase the little green anole lizards, watching them change color as they passed through different terrains and temperatures.

Despite my parents’ divorce and how it temporarily affected me and the relationship I wanted with other humans, I have an amazing relationship with my Dad. He has always made himself available. Even at times when I had little interest in our relationship, he was always there. Things have been tough for me the past few years and he has remained the rock for myself and my daughter. Having my own daughter, while navigating through some pretty treacherous circumstances of our own, has only amplified the tight bond I feel to her and family. I live *for* my daughter. I have made changes in my lifestyle that help to further secure more time with her, *for* *her*. I see now how it was so effortless for my Dad to be patient and consistent with me, as I watch my daughter grow and succeed at things in her life.

Living forever means that these intangible things related to family would eventually fall away, as the idea to live forever does not imply that others in my family would have the same *gift*. The threat of this loss has already impacted me, because as I have mentioned, my grandparents are older. Almost a year ago my grandma fell and broke her femur. She had been, on her accord and to this point, the caretaker for my grandpa who has dementia and Alzheimer’s. It was a long road to recovery for her and ultimately ended in having to move both my grandparents into assisted living. Although it has not happened yet, this assignment has me thinking, and I anticipate the loss of my grandparents to be detrimental. Which further has me thinking about the loss of my Dad. In the natural order of the progression of life, I will more likely than not, experience the pain and suffering these events will bring. And at this point, I cannot even broach the idea of the end of my daughter’s existence before my eyes.

I have come to the realization in the past couple of years, that my purpose on this Earth revolves around family. Without family, my life would drain into emptiness. I’m sure that there are many other things that one can find to fill the time with - and if I’m being honest in the life of a single mother, I am ***always*** wishing I had more time in a day. But in no way would the desire for more time equate to the life of forever. Day-to-day would become mundane and stale. In my complacency, I feel I would begin to turn my efforts outward as I would no longer have family to concentrate on. I’m sure I could make an impact to a certain extent - feeding the hungry, building shelter for the homeless, adopting all of the animals - but the nature of these problems are systemic to our society and require more than one person’s contributions for lasting change. Without lasting change, these efforts would begin to feel futile. I tend to be a problem-solver and knowing my personality, my inability to enact permanent change would grow into frustration with the realization that this is my eternity. For my own sanity, I have already cut out a majority of news feeds into my daily life, as it is depressing feeling that there is so much hate and turmoil in this world. Some technological advances work against us, such as the ability to immediately mass inform via multiple channels of communication, hurting the feel-good nature of a community when such communication is dominated by tragedy and destruction.

The opportunity to live forever in a young body also does not rule out hardships or disease. I think it goes without saying that if you lived forever, you would wish to be in a comfortable place in life and have a roof over your head, with available climate control, etc. I do not believe anyone would wish to be in a state of constant stress, wondering about where their next meal will come from, if they are employed or if they have a home. And while this may be a little bit of “reading between the lines,” having a young body may imply things such as your joints may be limber or your energy sufficient, but a young body can still succumb to cancers and other diseases. Young does not equate to healthy.

While the idea of being able to live forever may initially sound appealing to some, further thought on the subject brings to light that many of the things we desire to live with may be situational and/or temporary around us. It also stands to be recognized that a person’s past and experiences may influence their overall decision, and to each their own eternity. For me, I would miss my family more than I would thrive in an eternal existence, and with that said, I would rather choose to live a fulfilling life temporarily, than an empty life forever.