

“The older you get, the smaller the rooms get.”

The Danville News

Robert John Andrews

17 August, 2023?

“Twinkling”

Word Count: 750

Now that I’ve crossed the 70 threshold, time is tick-tocking that it’s time to rewrite our will, to make sure my family and Doctor know my end-of-life intents, and, last, to write down my funeral plans. Enough, I declare, with calling funerals a “Celebration of Life.” No! I want mourning and lamentation. I want the congregation to weep and wail that I am dead and gone. I want you all to be sad, not glad. Forlorn, not relieved.

The 70 year threshold. Where did it go? It really happens in the twinkling of an eye. Our years are marked by the chairs in which we sit. From cradle then stroller to high chair. Next come the plastic little chair and our first school desk, soon enough those table-arm desks for the lecture hall. Barstool yields to that first store-bought sofa, followed by comby recliner, finally wheelchair. We start off being pushed around. We end up the same.

Life is sudden – the unexpected diagnosis, the car crash, the heart attack, sudden even with the slow erosion of cancer. Life turns on a dime. How brief. In an instant. Between flaps of a butterfly’s wings. Wasn’t it yesterday when our baby girl came home from hospital? Wasn’t it yesterday when all three children drove off to create richer lives on the other side of the continent? They thought they’d rather try that in a place other than a small town. Both small and big towns have their virtues and vices. The gift is to mine the gold and purge the dross wherever you live.

When did 70 years become the past? Not as if there really is a past. Just the memory of what has been.

All we really do have is the twinkling now, which is an effective antidote to pride, to our hubris. We don’t last long. Which also could be an incentive to get it right and love well whilst we may.

“The past increases while the future diminishes,” said Augustine. Or, better, as a gracious lady at the nursing home chuckled sardonically: “The older you get, the smaller the rooms get.”

Theologians have long argued there really is no such thing as the past, neither is there such a thing as the future. Once the moment becomes the past, it ceases to be. The future does not yet exist. What we call the future is our present experience of hope, expectation. Yet we still measure time. But what we really measure is our present memory of time. All we have is the present. Which explains why all this seems a blur. You return from a vacation. Or you come home and pry off your dance shoes after her wedding. Did it really happen?

This might be what our deathbed is like. You’re about to pass into the twinkling of an eye and you wonder did those years really happen? They must have, you conclude, for here are the souvenirs. Here’s the photographs of our children, here’s someone weeping for me. Why is she weeping?

Then comes the time when we are freed from time. We go onto where we are destined to travel. Because we are conscious beings, we are fulfilled when we become one with the source of all being,

true reality. Twinkle twinkle little star. So I must hand myself over to you, Lord. You, Lord, must do it, for I cannot.

Could this be why we are born with that deep yearning for something more than this, a “feeling that something has evaded us, something that cannot be had in this world?” C.S. Lewis further wrote how eternal life is no mere escapism or wishful thinking but what we are meant to do. Completion. Fulfillment. Which begs the question of what really is meant when preachers speak of eternal life, confusingly translated as everlasting life. If I’m thinking clock time, this doesn’t sound so great, so divine. An eternity in heaven? If I’m thinking clock time, that could get really, really monotonous. How often do we have to sing these same praise songs?

Yes, when the twinkling comes, I want to know that I’ve been loved by my wife, my children, my friends. But I also want something more: I want to die knowing that I have loved them, loved you all, loved God’s world as well as I could have. How much time did I waste by failing to love the way my Jesus defines love? Did I live well enough to be mourned?