

## Shutting Out the Cold

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The days are getting shorter now and the nights are drawing in. Now seems a good time for reflection, a time to take stock of my life, to think about the changes which have happened over the years. I remember reading once that there were 7 stages of a man's life.

As I begin to reminisce, I walk around this tiny room which is now my home, my footsteps not as stable as they once were. I stare out of the window and see mothers walking by with their small children on their way home from school scuffing their way through the piles of leaves in autumnal colours on the roadside. One, pushing her infant in a stroller, looks my way and waves as she is accustomed to doing. I smile, the baby has grown so much. Infancy, from birth to 4 years, is the busiest time of life in terms of changes. Newborn, helpless babies go from being able to do nothing, to walking, talking, comprehending beings. I made all those changes myself but remember so little. My first memory, is a happy one, of running in the snow, wearing a red snowsuit. I must have been 3 or 4, having to jump with each step as the snow came above my knees and laughing.

Personality and character develop in childhood. My parents guided me and filled my life with love and warmth. As I grew up, I could move more freely, play more wildly and take more risks. I was a risk taker as a child, often doing things beyond my years and abilities. Sometimes this ended badly, with me breaking my arm climbing a tree for

example. As I came to the end of my childhood, so many changes had occurred, some obvious physical changes or academic changes like learning to read. My overwhelming feeling looking back is of joy, feeling loved and being safe in the arms of my mother.

Adolescence, a period of change, of turmoil and trauma, of becoming an autonomous adult. It is starting to rain outside, a storm is brewing. I was an easy adolescent, at least I think. Good friends became more important than family for a while, spending time listening to music, going to concerts and dancing til the early hours. I became more confident during this time, more able to have conversations with people. I became interested in politics, religion and literature..... and love.

Love is what characterises my memories of being a young adult. University came and went, I started working and became impressive in my career. My confidence, found in adolescence, served me well. My life changed when I married, took on responsibility of a wife and lost my identity in family for a while. I became a father, a job so all-encompassing that I could think of nothing else. The sheer joy and feeling of total love that comes with holding your own newborn baby can never be equaled.

Hitting 40 and the mid-life crisis was a major change in my life. I shiver with cold now and turn to light the fire. It splutters into life and the flames flicker, warming my small apartment almost instantly. I remember focusing on the inevitability of life, that my responsibilities were overwhelming. I embraced many new things during this time, made changes to my life. I learnt Spanish and bought a motorbike, small changes in comparison to those which happened during other stages, but they helped me.

As I moved into retirement, so many changes. It is getting dark outside now and the storm is coming to an end. I move around the room, turning on lamps and turn on the kettle to make tea. No more work in retirement, so much free time. We travelled, saw places that we had never dreamt of going to. New places, new experiences. A time of re-discovering life, being carefree again.

Now, things are different again. I move to the windows and close the curtains shutting out the darkness. Some people see old age as a negative stage, with decreasing abilities and decaying thought processes. As I turn around in my warm apartment, and smile at my wife, coming out of the kitchen and handing me tea, I realise that old age is not a negative stage, but a time to think back over my life and to be happy about the changes I have been through. They have made me the man I am today.