

ON MON

Job prospects recede along with hairlines

Have you noticed that many birthday cards make fun of a person's getting older?



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At the Hallmark Web site, in fact, there's an entire category of free e-birthday cards mocking people because of

their advancing age and their likely infirmities.

I've sent out such cards myself. One of my all-time favorites shows, on the front, an actual 19th-century photograph of a group of white-haired women sitting outdoors on chairs. Behind them is a building on which is printed, at the top, OLD LADIES' HOME.

The front of the card says: "Happy Birthday."

Inside the card: "Your room is ready."

While such cards are probably not intended to hurt anyone, and they can be funny, they do reflect the fact that we Americans find old age repugnant.

For good reason, of course. There's a greater possibility we will come down with a chronic illness as we grow older. There's the threat of running out of money. Then, there's prejudice.

Getting a job after age 50 is murder, an economist recently wrote me.

If you're not there yet, you have something to look forward to — something nasty: job discrimination against older people.

I've been turned down for jobs where I believe that my age was a key factor.

"How old are you?" a fellow on the phone once asked me some years ago. "I'm 51," I said, startled. "That's a great age!" the fellow said. I never heard from him again.

Yet more and more older Americans will be looking for work in the future or trying to keep their jobs. The baby boomers have not done much to save (or invest) for their golden years.

A poll conducted by the Ascher Group, a provider of contract human-resources professionals in Roseland, found that a vast majority of New Jersey workers do not believe that they are financially ready for retirement, even if they are near or at retirement age.

Less than 20 percent of workers in the state believe that they are financially ready for retirement. And one-third of New Jersey workers who are retired say they were not ready for retirement, financially, when they stopped working.

As the state's workers reach retirement age, more people will be choosing to work — for financial and self-fulfillment reasons, said Susan P. Ascher, president and CEO of the Ascher Group.

But the picture is not entirely bleak. We will need more older workers in the future — because of the baby bust, the fewer young people who were born right after the baby boom. Also, older people who work usually are healthier.

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(Whether they were healthy in the first place, and therefore could work, is a good question. But I think that working can boost one's spirits and self-esteem.)

Besides, there's plenty of evidence that older workers are less likely to take sick days and to be more conscientious in general.

So, why is there such wide

spread ageism?

Among employers, it may be because — as someone once told me — “I don't want to have to fire my mommy or daddy.” Older people remind you of your parents, and you don't want to have to come down on them if they under-perform.

Besides, older workers may know more than you do; you would, naturally, prefer to show off your knowledge to someone wet behind the ears.

Then, there's the reason hardly anyone mentions. Older people, let's face it, are not so

physically attractive as young people. The blossom on your cheek turns to chalk (to quote “My Fair Lady”). Silver threads are not quite as alluring as gold. Wrinkles, liver spots, jowls, thick eyeglasses, hearing aids, yellow teeth, pot bellies, stooped shoulders. The ears and the nose continue growing as you age, I'm told.

When I saw a few of my high school teachers not long ago, after not having seen them for 40 years, it was as if these lovely ladies had been cruelly bewitched.

The Daily Record (continued)

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The Cherson Group

Remember the joke: What's this? “10-9-8-7-6- ...?” It's Bo Derek getting older. (She was the star of a film called “10.”)

And if the basic function of a human being is to reproduce DNA, to procreate, an older person is simply not so nubile as a younger person.

These days, I've noticed that young women are not so receptive to my flirting. (Of course, they weren't very receptive when I was much younger, either.) Young people in general don't seem interested in befriending me.

Of course, I can recall, in my youth, paying scant attention to any much older co-workers. Their interests, their experiences, their conversation, even their sense of humor were somewhat alien. Besides, they weren't especially attractive.

To many young people, when you come right down to it, we older people are alien and inferior.

In my case, I've found that a good solution is simply to socialize with other older people.

I especially like it when I

join a group, look around the room and can note with pleasure that I'm bringing down the average age. And these days, women in their 60s and 70s don't look half bad.

By the way, my birthday is Jan. 22 and I will turn (illegible) years old.

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