



## Cannot Make the Rent

Foreclosing on the old 5 senses: refusing to pay the soul's rent, mortgages planted in my heart carrying me into repetition of an odd human history no longer suitable to wear. Everywhere I turn I mirror me, slightly off center, slightly fearful over the reflection of true nature.

This is for you and me, professional self torturers, the king and queen of dualist thinking. We could teach it, this fool's practice, this denial of our clear beautiful Buddha mind.

— ROBERTO VALENZA

## China Pill Park

I am looking for a chaman in Pill Park to connect me.

I am waiting for a replacement Gregory to share with.

I am always waiting for a change of heart, a break in the game, a tip on a winner at the divine gates of Hell.

I am waiting for a new voice and the same pills.

— ROBERTO VALENZA

Adventures in Poetry with ©Dr. Wes Browning



**L**et's whine about getting old! Aging stinks. I just found out I've been eligible to join AARP for four years already. Gack.

At least I've had plenty of practice getting accustomed to this situation. It all started back in '84 when I was driving a cab and sleeping in the '69 Rambler. Something about sleeping on the front seat of a Rambler plus malnutrition plus nearly dying of exposure plus being rejected by normal society for months at a time resulted in premature gray hair.

So it was that when I was 35 a little back seat 6-year-old passenger of my cab said to me "You're old, aren't you?" Aren't little brats just adorable? I think so.

Immediately I looked for ways to cope with my new-found old age and I've been coping ever since.

**Coping Mechanism Number One:** Surrender. Not being able to do anything at the time about the sleeping in the car and the malnutrition etc., I decided to accept my new senior status. My first act of surrender was to go to a movie and announce proudly — without being asked first — that I wanted an adult ticket, because I was sure now that I was indeed an adult, finally. (If I was going to be a senior, I figured I had to pass through the intermediate stage.)

My second act of surrender occurred at Jack in the Box, when the pasty-faced teenager behind the counter offered me the senior citizen discount. I took it. He didn't check my ID; I didn't check his IQ. Happy times.

**Coping Mechanism Number Two:** Avoid hitting on 18-year-olds. We all have a tendency to react against our old age by trying to curl up with someone who lets us forget it. This, I have learned, is a huge mistake. Besides spending money too fast, the young ones take too long to train and they don't remember anything important. That is why I now happily belong to Anitra "only 8 days younger" Freeman. My problem with her is just that, being 8 days younger, she can't remember the days from July 9 through July 16, 1949. Also, she refers to me as "the old fart." Also, she spends money too fast.

**Coping Mechanism Number Three:** Denial. A lot of people tell me denial is a bad thing, but I think it's peachy.

So for example, I have not just turned 54. Instead, I have turned 18 for the third time. Another fun form of denial is to skip celebrating birthdays altogether and start celebrating birth minutes each day. Not only does this mean you get cake and ice cream more often (or in my case more beef and bean burritos), but it spreads the pain of aging out thinly.

"Oh yes, I'm older, but only by a day."

Of course the drawback to that last technique is that I am now at least 19,723.5 days old as you read this. I'll be twenty thousand in about 9 months. Ouch.

**The pasty-faced teenager behind the counter offered me the senior citizen discount. I took it. He didn't check my ID; I didn't check his IQ. Happy times.**

**Coping Mechanism Number Four:** Schadenfreude. Hey, it could be worse. I could be Strom Thurmond: 100 years and no longer counting. Or even unimaginably worse, I could be Chante Mallard, and be spending at least the next 25 years of my life, if I should live so long, waiting for parole on a 50-year sentence for killing a

homeless man by neglecting to get aid for him after hitting him with my car because I chose to drive while being drugged out and stupid and not caring about any other human being except myself. I'd rather be 54 than be her any day.

**Coping Mechanism Number Five:** Whining.

Why does whining get such a bad rap? It's a victimless crime. (Anitra says this is not true.) It's like self-gratification: we all do it, if we have any sense. It relieves tension almost as well as watching reruns of our favorite TV garbage. Let's show whining the respect it deserves. Our mental health depends on it. ■

