



(Illustration by Michelle Kondrich/The Washington Post)



Opinion

Letters to the Editor

All the joys of aging

Readers reflect on essays by Anne Lamott about growing older.

April 11, 2025

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The newsletter series [A User's Guide to Aging](#) draws from a year's worth of essays by Anne Lamott about growing older. In each edition, we share journaling prompts and invite readers to share reflections on their own experiences with aging. The responses we've received so far have been thought-provoking, funny and moving. You can read some of them below.

To read the full newsletter, [sign up here](#).

Beatrix Lockwood

Opinions newsletter strategy editor

In what ways has getting older changed your mindset for the better?

The aging process has been front and center in my life. I just turned 82 and moved across the country from Colorado to Virginia so I can breathe at sea level.

When everything in your life changes and you have to start over, the hardest task is to grab hold of the positive things. For me, they are being closer to a beloved daughter and her children, getting a rescue dog, appreciating the greenery, and learning that making good friends in a new area is possible.

Flexibility is the name of the game. Some days are easier than others.

Anjette Cooper, Fairfax

I allow myself to cry soft, wet, flowing tears whenever I feel like it — there's no need to be manly anymore. I appreciate my grandparents more now. They went through the First World War, the 1918 flu, then the Blitz in London. When I was 7, Granddad taught me how to march: He explained I needed to be ready for the next war.

Rod Baker, Lions Bay, British Columbia



Top Cardiologist Beggins: Quit Eating Blueberries Before This Happens

I celebrated my 68th birthday in September and decided that officially made me a member of the “old ladies who don’t give a flying fig” club. I have given myself permission to experience the grace of growing older.

I’ve grown my hair long because it’s fun to play with. I wear leggings and tunics and rarely wear a bra (even though I probably need one) because clothes that aren’t comfortable aren’t worth owning. I get up when I want, I eat what I want, and I drink more Pepsi than I should, but I’m okay with all that. I have taken up writing in the past few years and, if I say so myself, I’ve been pretty successful at it: I have had more than two dozen short stories published.

I worry about the state of the world, but I rarely worry about the state of me.

Patricia Miller, Edgerton, Wisconsin

Learning new things is key, in my opinion. Even if it’s not something that you will ever master. At 69.8 years of age, I’ve started to learn the bass viola da gamba. I’ll never be performance-ready, and I don’t care. I’m following Kurt Vonnegut’s advice: Practice making any art, music, song, dance, play, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, fiction, essay — no matter how poorly they turn out. Do it not to get money and fame but to experience becoming better at something, to find out what’s inside you and to make your soul grow.

Bob Gotwals, Durham, North Carolina

At the age of 70, I had the terrible idea of running my DNA through 23andMe. The results were so weird that I reran them through AncestryDNA. It turns out that my parents adopted me in 1954 a few days after I was born. I was the son of a 12-year-old rape victim.

I've been received with open arms by my biological mother's family, as they had long hoped "that kid" would find his way back to them. I have been able to share large family events with them. It is so wonderful to hear that I look like members of the family. I never heard that growing up.

I've also been in contact with my father's side, and we've had the conversation about what my father did. We're moving beyond that. Everyone involved in the adoption, of course, is dead.

Some days I sit here wondering why I did the DNA analyses in the first place. Maybe at this age it's better to leave the memories of love intact rather than stir the pot. What I now know has destroyed much of what I once considered sacred. The trust and love of my adoptive parents are now in question. Why didn't they tell me? My adoptive mother lived to 95 and had plenty of time to do it.

Old age is a great time to learn to forgive.

William Lee Arnette, Charlottesville

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Top Cardiologist Begg: Quit Eating Blueberries Before This Happens

What daily routines or rituals have you started later in life?

I am 83. Almost every day, I put on my iPod and take a walk while listening to my favorite classical music. Sometimes I go out just to take in the sights and sounds of life around me. And sometimes I walk to meet the boys at the coffee klatch to converse about our aches and pains.

We have been meeting for years. We used to discuss politics, but not anymore: too polarizing. Our group has recently diminished — two deaths and one disabling illness — but those who remain enjoy one another's company. We all know that we'll miss it as time moves inexorably forward.

Jeff Zaller, Columbia

I discovered a new hobby that I didn't have time for in the past: collecting sea glass, shells and pretty rocks.

Being outside, hearing the waves and the tumbling rocks, and going on a treasure hunt to see what the ocean has waiting for me have become an important part of my life. I gather the treasures, wash and sort them, paint some, make jewelry out of others, and then do it all over again. It's a joy! And, of course, I give the art I create to my friends and family.

Laura Chandler-Vierra, Laie, Hawaii

Notice the small 'miracles' around you, and write about what you appreciated.

I've taken to spending every morning eating my flax- and chia-enhanced oatmeal while watching the birds at our feeder and the squirrels racing across the top of our fence. My son implied I have nothing happening in my life, and I told him it is more than that: With him out of the house, I finally have time to see the miracles around me.

Meredith Fox, Bethesda



Top Cardiologist Begg: Quit Eating Blueberries Before This Happens

What are you capable of now that you weren't in your youth?

As my hair turned from gray to white and I slowed down, I became invisible. When you're invisible, you can dress inappropriately. Who cares if I'm overdressed if I enjoy it! No one's watching, so go ahead and do whatever you like. I'm writing a bad novel. I love to make up stories.

Jon Florey, Alameda, California

Forgiveness is liberating. It is a superpower of aging that is mostly unavailable to our younger selves. As life's regrets pile up, insensitive words and actions from my youth reverberated in my brain. I began to wonder: Who was the ignorant person who said and did those things? It couldn't have been me. Was I ever so callous, selfish and arrogant that I was capable of acting out in such thoughtless ways?

As we age, we come to realize that with youth comes a lack of maturity and an insecurity about who we are and how we should conduct our lives. In the clear light of hindsight, we see who we were and how we acted. Our guilt and shame turn to regret.

When this happens, we have a choice: We can either remain cloistered in our regret or we can learn to forgive ourselves in the knowledge that

we've lived with our regret, done our penance and changed for the better. Once you've done this, you can readily forgive others for their failings as well.

Paul Fior, Newcastle, Washington

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Top Cardiologist Begg: Quit Eating Blueberries Before This Happens

Probably the most beneficial trait to have as you age is the ability to laugh at yourself. Things that might have been terribly embarrassing when you were younger are now just funny. For example, falling can be dangerous but also very funny when you get past the fear. As an 84-year-old, I got my foot stuck in a drainage hole and couldn't get leverage to remove it. After a few minutes, my husband wondered where I was and used a ski pole to help pull me out. That event could have been stressful and upsetting, but the rest of the day was full of jokes about my foot in the hole.

A lot of the more negative things that come with aging can be viewed as a joke. If you are able to not take them too seriously, you are set for a happy old age.

Shari Reed, Albuquerque

What is something you know now about life that you didn't know in your youth?

When I was younger, I thought I wasn't smart enough, especially in

math. I was a quiet child, and I was an easy target of my math teacher's wrath.

Then, in my late 40s, I earned a master's degree. To do so, I had to pass a "math methods" course, which I did after taking several classes at our local community college. I cried when I got an above-average score. I was 48, and I finally knew that I was smart. Without sobriety, that would never have happened.

Elaine Sage, Oak Brook, Illinois

You never know what tomorrow will bring. Live each day with vigor, enthusiasm and a zest to learn just one new thing. Oh yeah, and tell someone, anyone, that you love and appreciate them in your life.

Len Petrancosta, Pittsburgh

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April 11, 2025

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