

When I was nine, I said, When I grow up I'm going to be a writer. Prose or poetry? Both, I thought. I wrote the first five pages of a novel. I wrote fairy tales and a song about a little dog coming in from a long "rome." About the same time, I inherited a Tennyson birthday book which had a quote for every day of the year. I knew my classmates' birthdays by their lines from Tennyson. Thus started my love affair with poetry.

Now, more than seven decades later and with a small number books published, I'm still saying, *When I grow up I'm going to be a writer.*

Because I'm not a household name like Margaret Atwood (five years younger), I find facing old age as a writer is not exactly uplifting; not, that is, if one wants to be published. Youth and physical attractiveness pack much more wallop than they did when I was a young writer. Being young, attractive, educated and confident gives one a huge advantage in the writing forum. Whatever I write, wherever I send my writing, I am old. I am not *marketable*.

Competition has increased. Higher education offers courses and degrees in creative writing. Such opportunities were not available years ago. The only advice offered me -- it was of course relevant and necessary, but hardly complete or supportive -- was "Learn to type!" In those days I lacked promotional skill and confidence. I lacked the nerve to send my work out.

I'm not bitter about this development. Young writers amaze me. I'm envious not of their success but of the justifiable opportunities available to them.

But these notes are supposed to be positive, a paean to being old and writing, learning and re-learning to paint scenes and experiences with words; of gratitude for a long life and a long memory; of still being able to expand one's knowledge, stretch meanings, introduce new concepts and interweave them with old ones; of focussing, either steadily or faltering, on growing in understanding, building treasured friendships, widening one's circle of like-minded souls, delighting in passing one's discoveries on to others.

- Perhaps, for some, writing is a safe house where age threatens to batter down the doors. For others, that house has let age in to sit by the fire and weave words and make plans: a submission here, a reading there, once in a while a workshop or launch. Never mind the paucity of financial rewards or accolades. Ignore the panic in your realization that time is running out. Come sit by the fire and warm your restless hands before you go back to pen or laptop to carry on.