

Eighty-eight

Today, December 18, 2015, I turn 88. I remember meeting an elderly jazz musician who said that if he knew he was going to live so long, he would have taken better care of himself. I have been pretty casual about the way I have taken care of myself. I smoked from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. I never worried about the sun—no hats or sunscreen during the summer. I was pretty sloppy about exercise. I did follow the advice I gave my children: everything in moderation, so I didn't eat or drink excessively. I have been lucky.

Of course, I have slowed down a bit. Walking is getting harder. I have a balance problem. I have become more dependent on my cane, and also on my glasses and hearing aids. My reflexes are a bit slower, and my memory is not as sharp, but I don't feel much different from 68. OK, 78.

I have observed on more than one occasion that I have been lucky in many ways: in work, in friends, and in family. I have also been lucky in the time and place I was born (1927, New York), the schools I attended, the organizations with which I have been associated, and the neighborhoods in which I lived.

I have worked from the time I was 14 in 1942, to my retirement at 70 in 1997. I loved my after-school jobs, while I went to Stuyvesant and CCNY, and I loved my after-graduation jobs, beginning with the ILGWU in 1950, and ending with the Fair Labor Practices Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. I was the epitome of the person who did well by doing good. Over the 47 years of my "full-time" working life, I was primarily involved in two important causes: the labor movement and the civil rights movement. And I now enjoy Social Security and two nice pensions.

I have a group of friends dating back to junior high school. There aren't too many people who can claim friendships of 75 years. Over the years, I have made countless friends and colleagues growing out of my involvement in three communities: the Jewish community, organized labor and civil rights. We have shared experiences, meals, meetings, conferences, rallies, picket lines, demonstrations, and even vacations. And I have had the good fortune of becoming part of my wives' circle of friends.

And family! To have four such wonderful children! We recently celebrated my daughter Carol's 60th birthday, and it was observed how fortunate she was to have her parents present. From my point of view, I felt blessed to have been there. She is happily married with a 10 year old son, Elliott, and she is involved in all the right causes. My son Lewis is both happily married and happily employed, and Carol's celebration took place at Nina's and his extensively and beautifully renovated home. My daughter Martha, also happily married to Mark, two artists with two terrific sons, Miles and Henry, are now living in Portland Oregon, awaiting job developments. And my son David started a new chapter in his life with a job in Pittsburgh.

And I am happily married. When the Brookline Senior Center was honoring Brooklineites who have been married over 50 years, I asked if I could be included, since I was married to my first wife for over 20 years, and my second wife for over 30 years.

Last year, when I turned 87, “four score and seven,” I wrote a take-off on Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. This year, as I turn 88, I went to the Chinese Supermarket, Super-88, to emphasize that I am Super-88. Eight is a very lucky number to the Chinese because it sounds like the word for wealth. Therefore you are twice as lucky at 88. Maybe 11 times as lucky. (The Chinese began the Summer Olympics in Beijing on 8/8/08 at 8 minutes and 8 seconds after 8 pm.) I am also lucky “Jewishly” having been born on the “18th” which is “Chai” which means life.

I have no idea what I will do next year, 12/18/16, but I have plenty of time to think about it. I am looking forward to a big blast for my 90th.

12-18-15