

Aunt Gertrude and other holiday lessons

I have a 20-something friend who spends her days working with the elderly. Many have dementia. Some are rude and blurt out foul language. Some are truly sweet. My friend seems to have a place in her heart for them all. She has affectionately dubbed them, “the olds.”

Over the holidays, I spent some quality time with the “olds” in my own life. And what I have found is that humor is vital, and it really is the life in your years, and not the years in your life, that make the difference.

Over Thanksgiving, I had the pleasure of spending some time with my boyfriend’s 80-something grandmother. Much to the delight of her family, this sweet-as-can-be woman donned a Ray Rice Raven’s jersey and posed for pictures. This lighthearted moment will surely be a lifetime memory for the family.

On Christmas Eve, I spent time with good friends and their relatives. My friends are taking their soon-to-be 70-year-old parents, who have been married 48 years, to Ireland this summer. To stay in shape, the mother is doing more than an hour of water aerobics three times a week. Smiling and laughing as they sat surrounded by family, it’s clear their lives are full and rich and happy.

My friends’ Aunt Gertrude also made an appearance on Christmas Eve. She might be on the brink of turning 90, but Aunt Gertrude is clearly full of sparkle and good fun. She walked into the party donned in a festive red blazer and a musical Santa hat, which was an instant hit.

“Can you believe I got my hair done and now I’m wearing this thing?” she said to me. “I still have hair under here, you know.”

I can only hope that if I make it to 90, I have half as much humor and energy.

For Christmas morning, I had breakfast with my grandparents, who are in their late 80s. They admit they are slowing down now, but their eyes light up as they talk

about all their adventures. Water skiing, trips to Monaco and dining out with friends were among the things they talked about. My grandfather has served in the military and had a career spanning more than 40 years at a dairy. But as he delighted in telling stories, it's clear he's had a life of fun as well.

"This life don't owe me nothing," said my grandfather, reflecting on his fulfilling life.

What a great thing to be able to say.

Finally on Christmas afternoon, I spent time with my other grandfather, aunts, uncles and cousins. My grandfather recently got out of the hospital and toward the end of the evening, he had my cousin, aunt and me cracking up as he joked about his situation and some of the unpleasant side effects. It's unfortunate he has health issues, but so wonderful he was able to just laugh about it.

I may still be a little ways away from being an "old," but I truly do appreciate the richness, joy and lessons they bring to my life.