

Persons in every age group wonder why time seems to move so much faster than it did in their pasts. It seems as if there is never enough time to get everything done and that the situation only gets worse. Many explanations have been offered for this, but few seem to hit the target as well as Phil Yaffe's explanation. We hope you enjoy and find it provocative.

Phil has been a writer and journalist for over four decades and is able to write eloquently about his personal experience with accelerating time.

*Peter Denning
Editor*

Why Does Time Go Faster As We Get Older?

by Philip Yaffe

It is a widely accepted adage that, "The older you get, the faster time seems to go." But why should aging have this effect? After all, there is the parallel adage that, "Time flies when you are having fun." But as we age, time flies whether we are having fun or not.

So what's going on?

I have recently been trying to understand the phenomenon, because for the past several years many of my days have been extremely long, yet the years still seem to be accelerating.

To tackle the problem, I did an Internet search to see what others were saying on the subject. Nearly all the returns had to do with parenting. "Oh, they grow up so fast. The days are long, but the years are short." This is perhaps a partial explanation; however, since the phenomenon occurs just as well to people who have no children, it cannot be the whole answer.

Some other comments had to do with getting religion. "I found God at the age of 30 and every day since I have been waiting to go to His kingdom. I am now in my 80s. Oh, the days have been so long, but the years have been so short." Again perhaps a partial explanation; however, since the phenomenon occurs just as well to non-believers as believers, it cannot be the whole answer either.

Many comments were philosophical. They said simply to accept the phenomenon and live each day to the full. Good advice, but again no advance in understanding.

I then turned to science. I typed in the search words "psychology of time". This turned up hundreds of articles, most of which were very technical, dealing with brain structure and functions, neurotransmitters and the like. To narrow the search, I typed in both "psychology of time" and "days are long". And got nothing at all!

Finally, I decided to sit quietly and ponder the matter myself. This turned about to be a wise decision, because I think I found the solution. It's really quite simple. It all has to do with "anticipation" and "retrospection".

Whatever the nature of our individual lives, we all anticipate things important to us. Then after they happen, we look back at them. For example, most school children look forward to the long summer vacation, which always seems to be an eternity away. Finally, it arrives. Then, almost before they blink an eye, it's over and they are back in school again.

Progressing from primary school to secondary school is another excruciating anticipation for a youngster, especially if the move is perceived as being an important step away from childhood into adulthood.

And so it goes. When anticipated, each new significant event seems to be excruciatingly far away. However, after the event, we regularly look back and exclaim. "Did it really happen that long ago?"

Our first love, our first heartbreak, driving a car, landing a job, marriage, etc. When we look forward, all these milestones seem impossibly far in the future. However once achieved, how quickly they recede into the past.

The older we get, the more milestones we have to look back on. So the farther and faster they appear to recede. So if sometimes the clock may seem to have stopped, the calendar always continues racing ahead.

For me, the high point of my life was joining the Peace Corps and serving as a volunteer teacher of math, physics, and journalism in Tanzania. I applied for a Peace Corps posting early in my senior year at UCLA. Processing the application took only about three months -- perhaps the longest three months of my life. It seemed more like three years. I was accepted and sent abroad for two years -- the shortest two years of my life, because I was having so much fun.

When I returned to Los Angeles, I could hardly believe the adventure was already over. The first week back seemed extremely long, because my heart was still beating 10,000 miles away. However, the weeks rapidly became shorter and shorter, then the first year, then the second year, and so on. I couldn't believe it when the first decade had passed, then the second, and so on.

I went to Africa with the Peace Corps in 1965 and returned in 1967. More than 40 years ago!

I of course have had many other milestones in my life, which are all rapidly hurtling away from me. Even the most recent ones already seem to be covered in dust. I am now 65. I don't feel old, but somehow I just can't get my mind around the fact that many of these things already look like ancient history.

If accumulating milestones is truly the secret of the accelerating years, what do we do about it? Basically nothing; we just have to accept it. However, this is not necessarily a negative. True, the good things are coursing away faster and faster into the past. But so are the not-so-good things.

The story is told of the biblical King Solomon. He once called his wise men together and presented them with a challenge. "Find me a cure for depression." They meditated for a long time, then gave him the following advice. "Your Majesty, make yourself a ring and have engraved thereon the words: This too shall pass." He had the ring made and wore it constantly. Every time he felt sad or depressed, he looked at the inscription, which tended to lift his spirits.

"This too shall pass." Indeed, it shall. Whether positive or negative, nothing in life lasts forever, even if it sometimes feels as if it will. We are certain of this because we know even life itself doesn't last forever.

We are all born to die. What happens after that is the subject of considerable controversy. But whatever it is, we are certain it is going to happen, and that it will almost certainly be different from whatever we know today.

Since I am now in my seventh decade (I am 65), for me this inevitability will probably occur sometime within the next 20-30 years, and almost certainly within the next 40 years. This seems like a very long time. However, the years are accelerating, so when it does occur my most probable reaction will be: "What! Already!"

Philip Yaffe is a former reporter/feature writer with *The Wall Street Journal* and a marketing communication consultant. He currently teaches a course in good writing and good speaking in Brussels, Belgium. His recently published book ***In the "I" of the Storm: the Simple Secrets of Writing & Speaking (Almost) like a Professional*** is available from Story Publishers in Ghent, Belgium (<http://www.storypublishers.be>) and Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>).

For further information, contact:

Philip Yaffe
Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)2 660 0405
Email: phil.yaffe@yahoo.com, phil.yaffe@gmail.com