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LIFESTYLES

Tyranny of the Birth Certificate

By Joan Maiden



February 1, 1953—the date on my birth certificate. It says I am 63 years old. I'm not sure what 63 is supposed to look or feel like. I wonder, "How old would I be if I didn't know how old I was?"

A study at Harvard put two groups of senior men in the environment of their youth—same clothes, furniture, music, cars, TV, magazines, etc. One group was told to reminisce about their youth and the other to act as if they were still young.

"...after just one week, there were dramatic positive changes across the board. Both groups were stronger and more flexible... But the men who had acted as if they were actually back in 1959 showed significantly more improvement. Those who had impersonated younger men seemed to have

bodies that actually were younger." The conclusion was, "the aging process is indeed less fixed than most people think. Wherever you put the mind, the body will follow."

There is no time machine to take us back and shag carpeting, the white go-go boots and miniskirt are probably best left in the past, however, there are ways we can impersonate our youth.

- Study the beauty of a butterfly's wings with the amazement of a 5 year old.
- Go out and play just for the joy of it? Hopscotch or jacks anyone
- Turn on the music you loved as a teenager and dance.
- How old would you feel cruising down the road in a '57 Chevy? Buy, borrow or rent one.
- Remember parking? Take a drive with someone special and park under the stars with the radio on.
- Did you ever want to run away and join the circus? A lady I know is taking lessons on the flying trapeze.



- Maybe you always wanted to be on stage. A group of ladies took up tap dancing in retirement and put on shows.
- Go back to college and take classes for the sheer pleasure of learning.
- Take a child to the children's museum and explore with her.
- Color. Adult coloring books are popular.

Just because the date on my birth certificate says I'm 63, I'll not let it tell

me how old I am—I'll decide. Today it may be 30, tomorrow, who knows? How old do you choose to be today?

If anyone needs me, I'll be under the table in my fort, coloring.

*The study can be found at <http://harvardmagazine.com/2010/09/the-mindfulness-chronicles>

www.maidenpower.com, joan@maidenpower.com, 217-898-3391