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Modern Maturity, the journal for the American Association of Retired People, claims a circulation of 20 million. Outfits selling high temperature electric blankets and magnified thermometer scales fill every edition in advertisements on the joy of advanced age. Throughout the magazine, the association offers insurance plans for protection and credit cards to charge the premiums. Brokers work to make the members rich and tax advice is available to preserve the new wealth.

Contributors fall mainly in the winter period of life. The popular theme finds old duffers and old grannies overcoming lumbago stifles and muscle stagnation by taking deep sea dives in the Bering Sea in wet suits and snorkeling off the back waters of the Amazon in bikinis and transparent bathing caps. Feature stories tell how yesterday's movie stars stay active by keeping picture albums of ex-husbands in alphabetical order to preserve the family trees. Once-famous musicians are lauded for hand-cranking phonographs to play old songs.

Last year after President George Bush parachuted from an airplane on his 72nd birthday, I expected the magazine to be selling parachute harnesses to go under dislocated shoulder blades and landing boots designed to contain varicose problems in the next issues. But I was disappointed. The stunt escaped attention. I thought at least Jimmy Carter was going to represent his party's

stamina by driving a tractor pulling a peanut harvester through a burning hoop, but nothing was heard from Georgia. No reports came on President Ford's retirement plan, however, that's nothing new as no one heard much about him when he was president.

I keep all my copies of *Modern Maturity* out on the coffee table in the living room at the ranch, thinking one of my siblings might want to know how to crochet a backpack to fit over a bad case of dowager's hump, or a good way to keep Metamucil fresh in kitchen humidors. (Use wool yarn for the backpack and a bag of rice to dehumidify the canister.)

I watch in waiting rooms and on board planes for sight of the *Maturity* cover page. Only graybeards and grandmothers read the magazine. Tells us long-tooths that we need to update our material if we want an audience.

Either Aristotle or the ex-Secretary of Agriculture from Utah once said, "the richness of wisdom rests in the brains of the aged." (I keep those two men mixed up. The short course I took in college on philosophy conflicted with a shorter course on the history of the Mormon Church. Afterwards, I kept confusing Camas and Plato with Brigham Young and the Joseph Smith guy of Salt Lake City fame.) But whoever it was, was unaware how little interest a young buck can show in retired folks' magazines.

Mention the flood of 1969 in front of a bunch of booming baby kids and their eyes glaze over like a slice of

eggplant changing colors. It is impossible for an old buffalo hunter like myself to draw much of a crowd if the only thing the gathering knows about buffaloes is there used to be a buffalo bull head imprinted on a five-cent piece.

Finding safe, common ground for discussions between the generations is a serious problem. The minute I find something funny, I learn too late it's one of the most earth-shaking matters to ever hit the planet to other generations. I absolutely collapsed into a hysterical, staggering, laughing fit from the news of Vice President Gore campaigning out in California and just happening to collect 50 grand at a Buddhist monastery.

Alone at the ranch, I went from room to room, howling at the thought of how much yak hair those disciples of the Dali Lama must have woven into shirts to make \$50,000. I even made up a little skit of the V.P. calling home: "Topper, darling, guess what, an order of those funny little Tibetan monks gave us \$50,000 from their humility slush fund. I knew you'd be touched, sweetheart."

But it makes me thankful I am not in the game of being funny. I don't get away with one minute of air time, calling a son or daughter-in-law on any phase of the political spectrum. Doesn't matter if Jessie Helms pulls a stunt P.T. Barnum found incredible, or the most liberal Congressman to ever support double taxation acts so silly he is the laughingstock of the children's TV circuit, I better keep my big mouth shut. The routine after every election is to have

a son call and ask, "Well Dad, how far behind did your man Hide Bound run?" or, "Dad, did old Stone Age McFossil-Brain get a call?"

One thing does work. I cherish contemporaries who go back far enough to remember when Napoleon was exiled to St. Helena. I still think Mr. Bush is going to cause Mr. Carter to overstep. However, instead of studying philosophy, I need a course in keeping opinions to myself.