

MEMENTO, HOMO, QUIA PULVIS ES...Memento, Homo, Quia Pulvis es - January 2005

— By Richard L. Kiniry

I'm not ready for the grave yet but if the list of the people I love were in two columns, the column mark those deceased is growing in relation to those I love and are still alive. That does not make me yearn for death but it does add a quality of sadness to life. Of course, I have the option of adding more living loved ones to help me forget those who are lost.

Each January we offer ourselves an opportunity to remember those loved ones who have died. First we remember the members who have passed away during the past year, then others in our personal lives who have died recently and finally we open the floor for stories and memories of those are deceased yet still hold an essential place in our hearts and minds.

Death is the hidden fact of life. Even the most melancholic, depressed person avoids the inevitable last act in their approach to daily living. Even as our limbs start falling off we can pretend every thing will be okay. I have always assumed that was necessary. If we faced death each day, the human race wouldn't have gotten out of the cave. A community full of people dwelling on death isn't going anywhere. It wouldn't be especially energetic, productive, or happy. So, ignoring our inevitable demise seems to be necessary for life to go on.

But, I suspect that it would not kill the human spirit to remind children, adolescents and especially young adults in business school that this is it: life actually is short; and making the most of life doesn't have to mean accumulating lots of stuff you can't take to the grave.

We do seem to be doing a good job of recognizing the stages of life. We appreciate that at certain ages our needs are different and our responsibilities change, and we are reminded often to save for our retirement years. But no one mentions that you may not live long enough to spend all that money.

In more traditional societies the ancestors are part of daily life and even here in families that hold on to tradition, the photos are displayed in abundance. In old, traditional Barber Shops they have pictures of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, sometimes even Roosevelt, on their walls. The past is treasured and displayed. In stores in the Italian Market or on Jewelers Row there are pictures of the street as it once was and of the fathers and uncles who started the business, then on a lower level the pictures of generations of staff members ending with newest children to join the family.

Acceptance of your own death makes sense only at a certain age; before then it should not resonate with a mentally healthy life, but an occasional jolt of recognition can give a young person's life more depth. It can free a person both from the expectation that life has to be a great success –

after all success is fleeting – and also free them to do their own great stuff, after all we only have one chance to be ourselves.

Memorial Sunday is coming, time to remember those whom we love but who have left us behind, time to feel ourselves in the stream of life. We bring the best pieces of the past into the present. Come and share your stories and memories.