

The golden oldies



MATT HENRY
THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

If you're under the age of 50, read no further; this column isn't for you. It's for old people.

Turns out I was officially "old" at 54. I thought my continued listening to the likes of Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin precluded that. I still feel "hip" and even sometimes "cool" at the advanced age of 67. Thus it was when I was over 10 years younger that I was labeled an "old man."

What? I'm only 54. That's not old. At least that's what my elderly church ladies tell me. They say I'm just a kid. But wait a doggone minute — I'm 67 with a few artificial limbs, just one working eyeball, a widower, and, unlike the Floyd, I've never heard anything by Pink. That means I'm one thing — old, darn it. And I like it.

When I was a young 54, a woman parked her car right in front of my driveway thereby blocking me in. As a pastor, I had to get to the hospital to see a parishioner and this large, empty van was blocking my way out. But no, it wasn't empty after all. There was an infant sleeping in a car seat in the back, seemingly abandoned.

Just as I was about to call the police, a "young" mother, dragging another child by the hand climbed into the van. I walked up and calmly began to say that it wasn't OK to block my driveway and it was really problematic leaving her baby unattended. She spat at me, "Old man." At that, she drove away, opening up her window and yelling her curse at me once more — "You're an old man."

A couple thoughts swiftly raced through my young brain.

First, I began to chuckle because, if calling me an old man was supposed to be an epithet, I figured she could have done a lot better. If she'd said, "I'll bet you even listen to The Eagles," then there would have been an issue. But as it was, "old man" bounced off me like the machine gun bullets pinging off the fighter jet cockpit windshield in the Johnson Wax commercial of 1960. Old? But I don't feel old. I'm still listening to rock 'n' roll, still eating tofu, still wanting a vintage VW bus. Old is — well, old. I'm young, man, even as I shake my bootie to Sly and the Family Stone. So is my 67 year-old friend, Paul,

who still listens to T-Rex, Iggy Pop and other "cool" bands. We were walking up Pendleton's Northwest 11th Street, an incline that "young people" avoid like the plague on Halloween night because even free candy isn't worth the effort. Paul related his recent story of walking up a hill where some Pendleton Bucks were practicing football. Impressed with his elderly vigor, they said, "Good job, old man."

When I asked him how that made him feel, he replied, "Finally, I got some respect." I'd been cursed for being "old" but Paul had been blessed. He's from Queens, I'm from Toledo. Go figure.

But here's the rub and everyone over 50 knows it — when it comes to aging, the goal posts keep getting moved back. Ok, so my bod is 67; big deal. Why is it then I feel so young? I'm just going on 30, for God's sake. My head disagrees with my body on this point so who should I listen to? The church ladies say I'm just a youngster. I read the Sunday comics assiduously. I chew bubble gum and love Silly Putty when I can find it. I'm a Pez man from way back. I despair over the fact that Mad Magazine is no longer published. And you say I'm not young? Please. "Old" is like, 80. But then I just know it. When I'm 80, the 90 year olds will be the "old people." And they'll agree, saying I'm just a "kid" at 80 while they refer to each other as "girls."

So here's the dealy-bob: in our self-absorbed, narcissistic, youth-worshipping culture where everyone over 50 must have a tattoo (guilty as charged) and we do everything in our power to forget the past, I've come to embrace the moniker of "old age." I'm young enough to know, but old enough to know better.

Yes, every gray hair, every wrinkle, every hair that sprouts from a weird place, every scar — they all testify to a life well-lived, marked by both tragedy and victory. Every varicose vein testifies to a victory over death, which is really old age. Being "67 years young" or referred to as a "young man" has no appeal to me.

I'm not young, I'm happily retired. But I'm not old because what old person digs Jimi Hendrix? I'm not young nor old. I'm just right. At least until the goal posts get moved again.

Matt Henry, a native Buckeye, is a Roman Catholic musician, a retired ABC/UMC pastor and a volunteer at the Outreach and the Warming Station. No one should be cold, hungry or lonely.

Local effort wraps up holiday hope

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — It takes a village when it comes to coordinating efforts for Operation Christmas Child — that's the sentiment of both Barb Wattenburger, Hermiston area drop-off leader, and Carol Frink, who heads up collection efforts at Stanfield Baptist Church.

An outreach ministry of the international Christian relief organization Samaritan's Purse, shoebox-sized packages are filled with toys, hygiene items, school supplies and other small gifts, which are distributed across the globe. OCC shares God's love in a tangible way, letting disadvantaged children know that they are special. People are encouraged to include a note of encouragement, a photo or Bible verse with their package.

Often, Frink said, it's the first gift some of the children have ever received. An item as simple as a toothbrush gives them something of their own that they don't have to share with dozens of other kids.

"Something we see as being so insignificant can really make a difference for children that don't have anything," Frink said. "As humans, that's the least we can do."

Operation Christmas Child is launching National Collection Week Nov. 15-22. Locally, people can drop shoebox gifts off at Calvary Chapel of Pendleton and New Hope Community Church, Hermiston. From there, the boxes are taken to the Tri-Cities, before heading to a processing center in preparation for international distribution.

When Samaritan's Purse established a drop-off location in Hermiston a decade ago, Wattenburger became a year-round volunteer with OCC. For a handful of years prior to that, she transported boxes to the Tri-Cities collection site.

And it's not a solo effort in the Wattenburger household, as she recruited her husband, Paul. In addition, she's teaching multi-generational giving back by including her grandchildren.

"Packing OCC boxes is one of our activities at Camp Wattenburger," she said.



Barb Wattenburger/Contributed Photo

The grandchildren of Paul and Barb Wattenburger, Hermiston area drop-off leaders for Operation Christmas Child — Millie, 6, Nolan, 7, Audrey, 8, Anna, 10, and Micah, 10, — pose for a photo in July 2021 after helping pack gifts that will be distributed as part of international project. This year's National Collection Week runs Nov. 15-22.

Stanfield Baptist wraps up effort

Frink is overwhelmed with gratitude by the response of her church family. The first year resulted in more than a dozen gift-filled boxes — and then, the effort exploded.

"In 2014, we had 128 shoeboxes. We thought that was huge coming from 14," Frink said. "We all have a heart for hurting children."

Over the past few years, Frink said congregants at Stanfield Baptist have really stepped up. Initially, she set a church goal of 400 in 2020. However, when OCC officials expressed concern that the global pandemic might result in lower participation, she approached the congregation, who responded by collecting enough items to pack 503 shoeboxes.

Wattenburger said she had no idea what to expect in 2020. However, she was excited to share that the number of shoeboxes collected in the area increased, with donations coming from 20 churches and several businesses.

"We are not just excited about the large numbers, but more importantly that each one of those boxes represents a child who was reached and shown that they are special and loved as an individual," Wattenburger said.

Ever the optimist, Frink increased this year's goal to 600. During a packing party, held Oct. 28, the final count was 619.

"It takes a village to pull this off," she said in a Facebook post.

"I am so grateful for our church family and their faithful support." Individuals, service groups,

DROP-OFF LOCATIONS

New Hope Community Church
1350 S. Highway 395, Hermiston

- Monday, Nov. 15, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Tuesday, Nov. 16, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 5-7 p.m.
- Wednesday, Nov. 17, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 18, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 5-7 p.m.
- Friday, Nov. 19, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Saturday, Nov. 20, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Sunday, Nov. 21, noon to 2 p.m.
- Monday, Nov. 22, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Contact: Barb or Paul Wattenburger at paulandbarbw@gmail.com, 541-567-8650 or 541-626-3159.

Calvary Chapel of Pendleton
1909 S.W. Athens Ave., Pendleton

- Monday, Nov. 15, 5-7 p.m.
- Tuesday, Nov. 16, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Wednesday, Nov. 17, 4-6 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 18, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Friday, Nov. 19, 4-6 p.m.
- Saturday, Nov. 20, 8-10 a.m.
- Sunday, Nov. 21, 2-4 p.m.
- Monday, Nov. 22, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

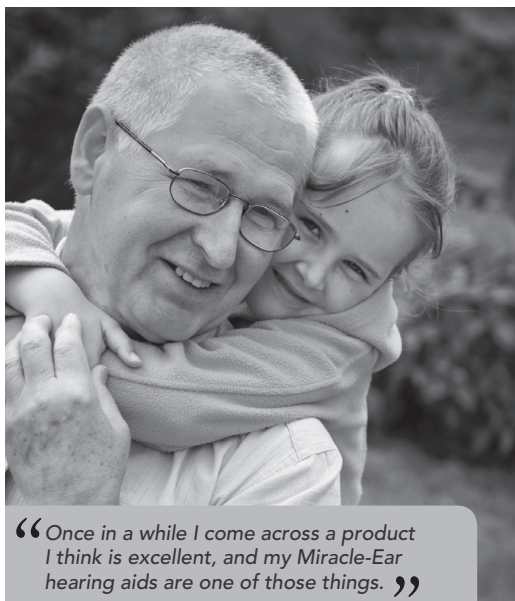
Contact: Colleen Hewes at hewcol@gmail.com, 541-379-6858.

businesses and churches are invited to fill shoebox-size packages with gifts. More information, including gift guidelines, an option to track your shoebox and an opportunity to virtually "Build a Box," is available at www.samaritanaspurse.org/occ. A donation of \$9 is requested to assist with shipping and other project costs.

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