

See what a big, broad, beautiful land we have here, then maybe a foreign land or two. See that there are honest, hard-working people in every corner of the globe, all quite certain that their own way of living, their local geography, their music, etc., is the most beautiful.

5. Keep your health. It's easy while you are young. But our fine, tempting, modern civilization can erode it easily too. Many a man or woman has finally worked himself into a position in which he could do something and then found he no longer had the health to do it or enjoy it.
- 5½. In view of the fact that good health and energy don't last forever, it's worth doing some things earlier than later. When my wife and I were about thirty and very broke, we built our own house, inch by inch, on a mountainside. Glad we did: doubt we'd have energy enough to do it now. And I've known too many people who put off such projects "until we have the money" or "until we have the time"—and if they eventually did get the money or the time, they no longer had the energy.
6. A happy sex life may take years to achieve, but it's worth it in the long run. Worth the time, the thought—or rather, the thoughtfulness—and, often, the waiting.
7. A few short ones. Prestige is much overrated. The celebrity business is for the birds. Respectability is nice, but consider: whom do you most want to respect you? Money is like air or water. You need a certain amount to live. Beyond that, who wants to be a dog in the manger?

And now I'll stop before I rattle on any longer, like any old graybeard. All the foregoing applies to the one central thing I mentioned at the beginning: how to keep discouragement from withering the priceless enthusiasm which most young people have.

... Well, here's hoping all the foregoing will help you avoid a few dead-end streets (we all hit some), and here's hoping enough of your dreams come true to keep you optimistic about the rest. We've all got a lot to learn. And don't let your studies interfere with your education.

Sincerely,
Pete Seeger

"There Are No Old, Bold Pilots," 1992

From *The Ageless Spirit*, Ballantine Books, 1992

In sailing we have a saying: "There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots." So I think one should praise

old people because they managed to get old. You don't manage to get old if you're too careless or reckless. And, you know the old joke: growing old is a lot better than the alternative.

When I reflect on where I am, I just feel blessed. I have good health and energy and a family that has stuck by me, even when they disagreed with me. And I have a large family. I lived with my grandparents as a child, and I had in-laws living near us when our children were small. Now I'm a grandfather in a three-generation household, and I have a lot of brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces. Also, I was able to make a living all my life doing something I loved. Think how many people have had to scramble just to pay the rent all their lives. My kids never went hungry. Oh, we pinched pennies, but that's the way things should be when you think of the people in this world who don't have a penny to their name—it's kind of immoral not to pinch pennies in a way.

I'm an old grandpa now. When I go out singing, I don't have much of a voice, but larger audiences than ever come to listen. I used to sing in Pittsburgh for a hundred people here, or two hundred there, but Arlo Guthrie and I went back and sang for 50,000 in a local park. So there are advantages to being a grandpa.

Another advantage is that you gain a bit of insight, a little more wisdom. That's one of the by-products of living a long time. I do know that I am more suspicious than ever, though, about words. We used to have a little sign hung up on this sloop club here where we're talking and it said, "In trying to persuade others, setting a good example is not the best thing; it is the only thing." And it's signed "Albert Schweitzer."¹ There's an old Southern saying, "I wish his 'do so' would match his 'say so.'" But, you know, I don't do as good a job of it as I wish I could. I still talk too much and don't act enough. Somebody, I don't know who, said, "Words lie halfway between thought and action, and too often substitute for both."

I guess I've gradually come to the opinion that everything's connected more closely than I realized. You can't really solve the problem of poverty on earth unless you can also solve the problem of pollution on earth. And vice versa. My guess is we won't solve the problem of racism and sexism and a whole lot of other things until each of us, individually, realizes how much we depend on others—sometimes those near and dear to us, sometimes those faraway and unknown. It gets you to thinking about eternity, about the spiritual, about the ways we are connected to one another.

1. Schweitzer (1875–1965) was a theologian and philosopher who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his contributions to ethical philosophy and his charitable work as a missionary in Africa.

These days, I look upon God as everything. Some people say, "Oh, God is in everything." Well, that's our difference of opinion. If I was able enough to look through an electron microscope, to see something one-millionth of an inch in size, they'd say, "That's God's handiwork." But I'd say, "That is God." If I was able to look at the screens of a radar telescope to see something five billion light years away, I'd be looking at God there too. They say, "Well, that's the handiwork of God." Well, okay, that's our difference of opinion. And consider that five billion miles away is a long ways, but it's nothing compared to infinity. I really believe that God is infinite.

The late great mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said that religion is the ideal of education throughout the ages because it inculcates duty and reverence. I think that's a good definition of religion—duty and reverence. He says, "Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events, and reverence arises from the perception that the present includes the complete sum of existence, that great amplitude of time, forward and backward, which is eternity." If that can't make you reverent, I don't know what would. We live in a web of interconnections. If I slap my hands together and I disturb some atoms, they're going to disturb other atoms and they're going to push others and, in effect, have influence for all eternity to come. That can make you reverent.

I try very hard to see the world as a whole, and I try to remind myself as much as possible that you can accomplish more with good deeds than bad deeds. The USA would like to have influence throughout the world, but we could have far more influence throughout the world right now if we had not spent three trillion dollars or more on guns and bombs in the last few decades. And they have plans for spending another trillion in the next few years with fancy, new, high-tech weapons in the sky and so on. But we wouldn't have needed any of these high-tech weapons if we'd spent half that amount of money on schools and colleges and training institutions throughout the entire world, because how are the billions of people in the world going to get out from behind the eight ball? True, they need food, but food is a temporary thing, as you know. Remember the old Chinese saying, "Give a man a fish, you can feed him, but teach him how to fish and he'll feed himself a long time." And so, if there was one wish I could have, I guess it would be for the world to learn this lesson, which it seems it still hasn't learned yet. The leaders of the world are saying, "Well, the way we solve this problem is to get rid of those people." That's their solution. But Abe Lincoln said it much better: "It's good to get rid of an enemy, but the best way to get rid of the enemy is to make him your friend." The important thing is, of course, the long human chain we are a part of; if we don't do it right, this chain's go-

ing to be broken in too many places. The world may keep on turning, but it may not have any human beings on it, or maybe not any life at all. I think we have to face up to this possibility.

Growing up is about becoming responsible, about lending ourselves and our talents and our energies to the great chain that connects us all.

... This is, of course, the world's best advice to any old person: You don't give up simply because you're not as good at it as you might have been; you still have fun with it. And this goes for almost anything. You do have to recognize limitations, or else you literally won't live long. Don't try and repeat your successes of youth; the aim is to have fun. And within your limitations you *can* have a lot of fun.

... I myself stay active doing a wide variety of things, some intellectual, others physical. I do an average of about three hours a week working in the woods around my house, because we burn four or five cords of stove wood every year. It's good exercise and kind of nice to be out in the woods, listening to the birds and seeing the leaves and the beauties of nature. It's also a time to reflect. In many ways those are the most satisfactory hours of my week. I get away from the telephone and just get to think. In fact, more often than not, the ideas I get for music or songs will come during those hours because in the day there's just too many things going on.

I'm just an old do-it-yourselfer, you know. I think there is a limit to specialization, and I take great pleasure in learning how to do new things. Now, there are times, I'll admit, when I'll be glad to let somebody else do things for me. I was very glad to have an expert doctor repair my knee when I foolishly tore the ligament in it; otherwise, I'd have been on crutches the rest of my life. But by and large, I love to see people in the world trying to do more things and not just watching other experts do it. My father puts it in a good way: "Judge the musicality of a nation not by the presence of virtuosos, but by the general level of people who like to make music." It's kind of the equivalent of what W. E. B. DuBois, the great black scholar, said: "I'd count the wealth of a nation not by the presence of millionaires, but by the absence of poverty."

My father told me there was a graveyard in Tombstone, Arizona, with a little wooden cross over some cowboy's grave and somebody had scrawled on it, "He done his damndest." And really, that's all we can do in this world: We do our best wherever we are to be a strong link in the chain. If we can be a strong link, we should know how lucky we are, even though the links to come never knew our name, don't know where or when we lived. But in the future, assuming there is a future, they'll know that they would not be there if it hadn't been for a lot of links that came before.