



## The Time of My Life by Randy Fitzgerald



### Spare me your grocery store trips on Facebook

A few months ago on a day when daughter Sarah was either really bored or temporarily insane, she set Barb and me up, unbidden, with our own personal Facebook accounts.

“But I don’t wanna be on Facebook,” I told her. “Remember, I’m the fellow whose e-mail account got summarily closed with over 30,000 e-mails intact, many of them unopened.”

“But you’ll enjoy it,” said Sarah. “A lot of old people are on Facebook these days.”

She was half right. A lot of old people are on Facebook these days. In fact, I learned from the Website “Inside Facebook” that the number of folks over 35 who use this popular social network nearly doubled in the first two months of 2009 – the period during which Barb and I signed on. One result is that there are now upwards of 200 million Facebook users, most of whom apparently went to my high school.

Every day more and more aging boomers, seniors, geezers and old fogies appear on my computer screen and ask to be my friend, and I am happy to welcome them all. I like having friends, even those that I don’t really know.

Barb and I signed on at the same time, but she has about four times as many friends as I do.

“How many friends do you have as of today?” Barb asks me every now and then. And when I say, “Fifty-six, I think. How about you?” she’ll say something like, “Oh, around 16,000, I think, but I’m not really counting them.”

The pioneers of Facebook – the young ones who have been with it since it was founded five years ago – must be in despair to see us old folks taking over. And once we arrive, there’s no turning us away.

I mean, if you’re still young and your mom issues an online request to be your Facebook friend, do you turn her down? Or do you sign her on and expose to an aging parent your wild adventures, your private language, your

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indiscreet conversations, your imaginative profile, and the photographs of yourself in an English pub handcuffed to an obviously displeased bobby?

My guess is, you sign Mom on and then open yourself an account on MySpace.

The younger members of my family haven't figured that out yet, so I've been reading their entries with glee. Sometimes I have to Google key words, like P90x and Wedding Warrior, to know what the devil they're talking about. But I have made interesting discoveries. For instance, my daughter's friends are either extremely scholarly or else write in code, my niece has a wry (and sometimes ribald) sense of humor, and my nephew has yet to accept me as a friend.

I don't think my generation gets the point of Facebook very well. They tend to use it like e-mail, as in-depth private correspondence – only on Facebook nothing is private.

The younger users deal more in short, snappy quips to share amongst many, many people. Since I personally suffer from a shortage of short, snappy quips, I've been more of a Facebook reader than a writer. And I try to ignore the long, boring accounts of others' trips to the grocery, stories about kids and dogs, or the sales pitch for the latest business venture, for which I should immediately sign up.

I wish I knew how to delete those instantly from my wall, but my electronic skills haven't advanced that far.

My "wall." That's some of the terminology that eludes me. I referred to my Facebook "page" for weeks until someone told me it's called a wall. And don't even begin to ask me what it means to get "tagged." If it happens to relate to skin tags, at least I am close to the 16,000 level there.

I must say I enjoy the wonderful photographs and videos that turn up on Facebook, often things from Youtube that I would never find by myself. I also like reading profiles, and I have reclaimed a few people with whom I had lost touch.

Now that I've somewhat mastered social networking, I asked my daughter to bring me up to date on the latest cell phone magic.

"Dad, I'd like to," she said, "but with your technological skills, there aren't enough years left in your life for you to learn how to send a text message."

At least she didn't write that on my wall.

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