

## Another year of curiosity

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It is a beautiful morning here on the East Lothian coast. My inclination is to get in a quick walk before I head for Edinburgh. In doing so, I might take a small celebratory coffee if I can find somewhere to serve me. It is, after all, my twin brother's 68th birthday, and I feel I should celebrate it with him, even if he is not here.

I have to admit that I find it curious to think that I might be 68. That is four years older than the age that The Beatles once defined as old. I also recall The Who once singing, "I hope I die before I get old", but I was not convinced at the time, and I am less so now.

I confess to not being a big celebrator of anything but life itself. It is my belief that finding the ordinary to be extraordinary and celebrating all the small aspects of it is a better way to live life than by creating events to mark the passage of time or particular achievements. Each is valid, but I prefer to look for what is good in everything, and most of the time, I can find it.

This week, I could have celebrated the first butterflies of spring, an influx of ladybirds into the garden, several acts of genuine friendship which have made my life feel better as a result (you know who you are), and also recovering from Covid. I feel as though I have my energy back this morning; I am also in charge of my voice, and it was shocking to find that it was quite hard to form words for a period of more than a week. I do apologise if some of the videos sounded strange as a result, but I refused to give in to this.

I also refuse to give in to society's idea of what it means to be older. So, for example, I work full-time, even though only about 20% of people my age do. But I celebrate the fact that I do so because I wish to. I am now free to do what I want. Whilst the work might be tiring (and John Christensen keeps on pointing out to me that I do insist on trying to pack two weeks' effort into any seven-day period), I do it because I think it is worthwhile.

If there is one thing that being 68 has taught me, it is that doing what is worthwhile is the most important thing in life. I spend a lot of time talking to people about work these

days. I do a little mentoring. The odd student still crosses my path. As a result of my coffee habit, I meet many young people who work as baristas, a lot of whom see it as a gateway to something else. Because of the person I am, I quite often get into conversation with these young people and exchange ideas with them. Many of them are asking, "What is this all about?" The team here at Funding the Future is also, on average, a lot younger than me, and the same question is asked.

My advice is always the same. Life is a marathon, not a sprint. Despite all the stereotypes, the expectation that you will find precisely what it is that you want to do straight out of school or university, and then make a successful career from it, has always been, and now most certainly is, quite ridiculous. There will be exceptions, but that is precisely the point: they are exceptions. For most people, life is a journey involving significant twists and turns. The greatest skill required is the ability to navigate. It is one rarely taught.

And there is one big question that is also never on the agenda, because it never occurs to most people. That is, why do we live in a system that requires us to work every hour that we are given when we are told that leisure is the activity that we should aim for?

Following on from this, why do politicians see it as their goal to force everyone into work, come what may? And why are they so dedicated to making sure that worthwhile activity, not necessarily rewarded with pay, is penalised so harshly within our economy?

Is it that both our economics and our politics have a fixation with control, and that by forcing people into employment, that control can be created both over the person and over what they might do, by constraining their earning opportunity? Both now seem to me to be very real possibilities and worthy of further consideration.

And I guess this is my real point. At 68, I remain deeply curious, and above all else, it seems to me that the greatest gift that life can bestow is that of curiosity, and the need to search for answers. The only thing I fear is losing that, but right now, that feels very unlikely.

I am looking forward to another year on this planet and all that it might reveal.