



## writers and wordsmiths

[Life](#) May 22, 2026

On Turning 83

*Reflections on aging in the “fourth quarter of existence,” a forthright assessment of what life holds if lucky enough to make it to overtime...*



by: Matias Travieso-Diaz

*By the time you're 80 years old you've learned everything. You only have to remember it. — George Burns*

I often say that the life of a human is like an American football game. During the first quarter (ages 0 to 20) one grows, develops,

matures, learns new things, acquires skills, and tests oneself against the world. In the second quarter (ages 21 to 40), one finds a place in society, a spouse, a circle of friends, a path for the future. (At halftime one hopefully reflects on life thus far, and makes small or big tweaks to optimize what lies ahead.) In the third quarter (ages 41 to 60) one achieves whatever measure of success life has in store, and starts trading physical well-being for increased personal satisfaction in one's lifestyle and accomplishments. In the fourth and last quarter (ages 61 through 80) one coasts towards retirement and the quiet enjoyment of the fruits of a lifetime of working and loving. For those lucky enough to stay on the field beyond the end of regulation, there is an overtime period (age 81 and beyond) in which one continues to appreciate the beauty of life and approaches the uncertain end of the game with some trepidation but hopefully without becoming overwhelmed by pain and suffering.

I am now well into the overtime period of my life. I am arthritic, weak, with poor balance, overweight, hard of hearing, sometimes incontinent, often forgetful, and full of aches and pains. Yet I still enjoy the game and hope to continue playing it as long as I have wits and enough strength to hit my laptop's keys. What drives me to want to keep going amidst all current adversities? Let me count the ways.

First is the enjoyment of life, limited as it is, and the memory of pleasures and sensory delights from days long gone. I can still cherish the gentle caresses of a spring breeze, the warmth of a sunny summer day, the subtle hues of the turning leaves in the fall, the pristine beauty of a fresh layer of snow on the ground. I am still moved, as I was sixty years ago, by a heartbreaking melody by Schubert, the third act of *Bohème*, the final song of *West Side Story*. The aroma of freshly baked bread, the perfume or gardenias in bloom, the pungent smell of roquefort cheese, will stay in my memory forever. And the tastes...ah, the memory of the delightful foods my wife used to prepare, the paellas, the orange ducks, the trifles, the Thanksgiving soups and Passover macaroons, a universe of flavors, mostly gone but still alive in my memory.

Next is love. My wife, the great love of my life, is long gone, but other sources of love and affection remain: my daughter, my other relatives, a few loyal friends, my dogs. I know they will mourn me and will be saddened by my parting. I wish to spare them the pain of my departure and wish to keep the comfort of their company as long as possible. My life has been bolstered by love and I would like, to the greatest extent possible, to continue to draw upon the love of those around me to sustain me and comfort them.

There is perhaps curiosity. The world today teeters between progress and disaster, with both occurring simultaneously and trying to edge each other out. I am an unwitting witness to this drama and, even though I have little left to gain or lose by whatever happens, I strongly desire that my daughter and others in her generation and beyond get to live in a more sensible and humane world than what we are currently experiencing. Will that happen?

There is also a sense of duty. I found my true calling late in life. After many years of other endeavors, I discovered upon retirement that being a writer of limited talent but great ambition should have been my professional goal all along. I cannot make up for seventy years spent in other activities, but feel I still have more left to say and want to continue to do that saying before I am forced, by death or disability, to become silent.

Then there is vanity. Whatever little I have accomplished in my brief stay in this world and whatever meager accolades I have received for my contributions, I want to do more and elicit more praise for my efforts, a process that I wish to continue while I can still enjoy it. Posthumous praise and fame are all fine and good, but will no longer feed my ego. I want to get more done, and receive more positive feedback on it for as long as I can.

And fear? Yes, I know death is near, perhaps lurking in the room next to my office. I am not afraid of death, of the eternal absence that will occur one of these days, and accept it as something inevitable and not worth spending time pondering about. But I do fear *dying*, a process that can be prolonged, dehumanizing, painful, and burdensome on my spirit and the souls of those

around me. When it comes, I would wish my death to be as rapid and painless as possible. I try to keep myself in as “healthy” a condition as I can, so that when my heart gives way it is not the result of lack of care on my part. But when the final hour comes, I hope to greet passing with fortitude and dignity.

For all those reasons, and maybe out of the quiet but potent force of habit, I would want to stick around for a few more years. Perhaps there is an afterlife but, in any case, I find numerous reasons why I want to keep myself going a bit longer.

Wish me luck.

*Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over two hundred and fifty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books, and podcasts. One of his four novels, an autobiography entitled “Cuban Transplant,” and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.*