

"Through Time's Lens: A Dialogue on Growing Older and Staying Grounded"

Conducting my interview with Vincent was an experience far more emotional and introspective than I initially anticipated. What began as a simple conversation gradually evolved into a profound dialogue about life, aging, faith, and self-reflection. Vincent, now in the "young-old" stage of life, is a man in his late sixties who has maintained a robust sense of purpose despite the physical and social changes that go with aging. As we spoke, it became clear that Vincent, though still relatively active and engaged with life, had begun to confront the realities of growing older reflecting on his past, making peace with his present, and contemplating the years ahead with both optimism and a degree of uncertainty.

Vincent's unwavering principles and deep spiritual convictions have been guiding lights throughout his life, and they continue to anchor him as he navigates this stage of aging. However, my probing questions, particularly those that touched on sensitive memories from his earlier years, took him by surprise. At several points during the conversation, Vincent's eyes welled up with tears as he confronted moments from his past that had been hidden away, tucked beneath layers of strength and resilience. His voice quivered as he spoke about the hardships he had faced times of loss, sacrifice, and profound loneliness that he had long chosen not to revisit. These memories stirred emotions he hadn't fully processed until now, revealing that even as we age, the past remains a powerful force in shaping our sense of self.

Despite the emotional toll, Vincent later expressed immense gratitude for the opportunity to revisit these lost memories. He described it as a bittersweet, yet healing experience—one that allowed him to rediscover parts of himself he had forgotten. "It's strange," he said softly, "how the things you thought you buried still hold so much power over you." His reflections on this process were deep and sincere, and it became clear that he was learning something new about himself in real time. The unexpected depth of our conversation left him contemplating aspects of his life he hadn't considered in years. "I never thought I'd be reflecting on some of these moments again," Vincent admitted with a shaky laugh, "but you really got me thinking today." Though my questions at times took him by surprise, he welcomed

the challenge, seeing it as an opportunity to grow and connect with emotions he had long pushed aside.

Vincent's perception of the aging process is complex. On the one hand, he has a powerful sense of faith and purpose, qualities that give him a feeling of control and resilience as he ages. He is still active in his community, attends church regularly, and continues to live comfortably and happily, taking care of his responsibilities with an intense sense of purpose. He described his aging experience not as a time of decline, but as a period of reflection and refinement—a chance to deepen his connection to the values that have always guided him. However, Vincent is also acutely aware of the physical limitations that come with age, and he expressed concern about the future, particularly the potential for loss of independence. "I feel good now," he said, "but I know there will come a day when I won't be able to do everything on my own. That's the hardest part about getting older knowing that one day, you might have to rely on others for things you've always done yourself."

As our conversation drew to a close, I felt compelled to remind Vincent of something important: the need for self-care. While he is quick to take care of those around him, offering help without hesitation to anyone in need, he often overlooks his own well-being. Vincent's giving nature—while one of his greatest strengths—also sometimes leaves him vulnerable to neglecting himself. In many ways, he and I are alike in this regard. We share the instinct to support and uplift others, whether it's offering a helping hand to someone stranded in the cold or providing water and shelter to those suffering in extreme heat. But as I reminded him, it's crucial to remember that self-care is not selfish; rather, it allows us to continue serving others with the strength and compassion they deserve.

One of the most poignant moments of our discussion centered on Vincent's reflections about society's current state. He spoke candidly about the generational divide and the loss of respect and connection he observes in today's world—particularly in younger generations. "These kids don't even know what playing outside is anymore," he remarked with a hint of sadness. "They watch other kids play games on YouTube instead of playing their own. There's no life in this world anymore." His observations underscored a growing concern about how technology has not only shaped but also diminished human interaction. Vincent's reflections

echoed theories I've studied about the social disengagement that can accompany aging. He voiced a longing for the community and social connections that were more prevalent in his younger years, lamenting that people today seem to have lost touch with those fundamental human experiences.

Reflecting on the interview process itself, I found that the depth of our conversation and the trust Vincent placed in me were the most rewarding aspects of the experience. His openness and vulnerability allowed us to connect on a deeply human level, transforming the interview from a simple exchange of words into a meaningful exploration of life's most profound questions. One area that could have been improved, however, was my sensitivity to Vincent's emotional responses. There were moments when I could have paused to give him more time to process his thoughts and emotions, rather than pushing forward with the next question. In hindsight, allowing for more moments of silence and reflection would have added to the depth of our conversation, giving Vincent the space to fully articulate his feelings.

Another aspect I had to consider was Vincent's stage of life, particularly when it came to accommodating his needs during the interview. Although Vincent is still relatively independent, I made small adjustments to ensure his comfort—such as choosing a quiet, familiar environment for the interview and pacing the conversation in a way that allowed him to express himself without feeling rushed. I was mindful of the fact that as people age, their cognitive processing speed may slow, and they may require more time to formulate their responses. These age-related accommodations not only helped Vincent feel more comfortable but also enriched the interview, allowing for deeper and more thoughtful answers.

In reflecting on this interview, I am reminded of the importance of dialogue, self-exploration, and empathy. Vincent taught me that we each have a unique story to tell, and that understanding others—truly seeing their experiences—is essential in creating a more compassionate world. Our conversation not only brought Vincent's memories to the surface but also ignited a spark within me to be more mindful of the ways in which we all contribute to the fabric of society. If we can learn to see through the eyes of another, as Vincent suggests, we can begin to rebuild the connections that have been lost in today's fast-paced world. And perhaps, with more

conversations like this one, we can start to restore some of the respect and understanding that the world so desperately needs.

-Interview with Vincent L. Sawyer by Tisha L. Stahl