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Ten Boomer Thanksgiving Wishes

By John W. Martin

The economic meltdown and our arrival at life's midpoint have conspired to create an especially memorable occasion to give thanks. Here is our top 10 list of what Boomers are especially thankful for this season.

1. **Family:** The older we get, the greater the desire we have to build closer relationships with our family. Over a quarter of us are now actively caring for our parents. Meanwhile, four in ten Boomers are grandparents, giving us more and more family members to love. This number will continue to grow. For the next 20 years, a new grandchild will be born every ten seconds.
2. **Health:** If you've still got, you're thankful. That's because our health is fast becoming one reality we can't totally control. The warranty simply runs out. While we expected the day would come when we stashed pairs of readers and bottles of Aleve around the house, we didn't expect just how much the sins of our past would haunt us. For example, half of us - 38 million Boomers, are experiencing some degree of hearing loss, according to a new research study.

Even more alarming are the emerging health reports on the oldest Boomers - 60 to 64 year olds. According to researcher Teresa E. Seeman, PhD, those Boomers are ushering in a new trend: disability. In the November issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, Seeman reports that one in five oldest Boomers need help with basic daily activities -- up from 13% just a decade ago. *Yes, that's 20% of us.* The culprit – obesity. People who entered their 60s from 1999 to 2004 were much more likely to be obese, to have a too-large waist line, and to get less exercise than those who turned 60 from 1988-1994.

Oh, joy. Just imagine the onslaught of chronic diseases lurking ahead. As organ recitals now take stock of our personal health-related conditions, rather than our kid's musical accomplishments, we are thankful for our health more than ever.

3. **Home:** In recent memory, the perceived role and value of our home has been on an emotional rollercoaster ride. For many, their home was an investment asset — something to leverage or flip. Unfortunately, this bet didn't pay off for millions of Americans. Lesson learned. We have reaffirmed the traditional role of our home. In Bob Dylan's poetic words, it gives us "*shelter from the storm.*"
4. **Personal Time:** As most of us have now reached the halfway point, we have also reached the time in our lives where we realize the importance of, well, *time left* in our lives. As the architect of the 60 hour work week, Boomers, more than any other generation, have lived to work. Today, more and more of us are thankful for the teachable moments offered by our younger Gen Y and Gen X co-workers who *work to live.*

5. **A Paycheck:** Eight million jobs have been lost nationwide since the recession started. Workers ages 45 and over form a disproportionate share of the long-term unemployed — those who have been out of work for six months or longer, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unemployed Boomers, many of whom believed they were still in the prime of their careers, are confronting the disturbing reality that they face some of the steepest odds of any job seekers. Most economists project further employment cuts. If historic patterns hold, unemployment will continue to rise for another year.

While surveys suggests that less than half of Boomers are really happy with their jobs, this Thanksgiving we think 100% of Boomers with jobs are extremely thankful they have a paycheck.

6. **The End of Wretched Excess:** Our crazy days of spending beyond our means are over - for good. The Great Recession has made us realize what's important and what's not. We have arrived at what we believe is the start of a new era of responsible consumerism. We have coined it the "*New Fru*" or new frugality. The Silent Generation's virtue of "waste not, want not" is now the model behavior. According to recent research by Synovate, the majority now expect this mantra to guide them well after the Great Recession ends. Nearly 60% said they would try their best to keep a tight rein on their spending so that it doesn't go back to what it was before the downturn. Over two-thirds are more interested in boosting their savings than reducing their debt. We give thanks to the "new normal."
7. **The Sound of Music:** No, not the Rodgers and Hammerstein music, but rather the music of our generation – the Stones, Beatles, Springsteen, etc. We turn to familiar music to help find comfort and direction in these unfamiliar times. Thankfully, we don't have to turn the dial far. For some unexplained twist of fate, the music of our youth is now the music our children play. How cool is it that my 16 year-old daughter plays the Stone's "*Wild Horses*" on her new guitar?
8. **The Freedom To Be:** We are thankful for underlying principles of our nation and the many men and women in uniform in the past, present, and future who protect us. They make it possible to collectively and individually seek our own happiness in our own way. While we may argue about the level of military might and deployment, we are all proud to be American and thankful for the many people who dutifully and selflessly serve our nation.
9. **The Written Word:** The electronic age has eroded the language. Nouns are now commonly hijacked as verbs and contextual adverbs and adjectives have been banished for efficiency sake. TV entertainment has become a wasteland. As one of our readers recently noted, it is only tolerable with TiVo and Comcast On Demand. The commercials are stupid, at best, and insulting, at worst. It is the one venue where ageism, the last bias alive, is rampant. Seriously, are all middle aged white guys stupid? The lack of reality and smart writing makes Boomers appreciate and value more and more the experience of holding a thoughtfully constructed newspaper or good book.
10. **The Possibility of Remaining Relevant Until the End:** For almost 50 years, we have been at the center of it all. We are now thankful that a new age in American culture is unfolding where being "old" is cool. The reason is simple, the cool people have gotten older and plan on remaining cool. Bruce Springsteen on the cover of AARP's November magazine cover says it all. We live in a country where thanks to the very large Boomer generation reaching age 50 (only

five more years to go until all Boomers are over 50), growing “old” is in everyone’s future. Let us give thanks.