

## Another year older/They made fun of me blowing out the candles

First, let me get something straight here. I don't really do birthdays. It's just an arbitrary date on the calendar, without a whole lot of meaning. Unless, of course, it's one of the "important" birthdays, like 18 (supposedly an adult and you get to vote), or 21 (you get to drink, which never did much for me), or 25 (you can rent a car, and insurance rates go down). To be sure, there are a few other lesser milestones, such as 35, where you're not really sure if you're still young but you don't see what further passing of years is going to do as far as worldly intelligence (because you naively think you're smart enough to take all comers), and maybe 40 which, at least back-in-the-day, was about the oldest you'd want to be when starting a family. I guess 40 is when you'd better have it together or at least have a plan; otherwise, you're likely to simply become an older version of whatever you are now (a denial of the need to progress, but why am I saying that as if it's a bad thing?).

Today, I became 55. Not of my own choosing, which is perhaps one of the reasons I don't do birthdays. They just happen. I have no control over them, and that makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. At 55, I should have control over more of my life than I did earlier. Things should go more according to plan, because by now, I've had plenty of time to learn from past plans that went bad (ok, mistakes), and in all likelihood I've had more opportunities to make mistakes in the past than I will in the future (living past 110 not being terribly likely, although my grandmother, at 101, could possibly do just that).

So, when the candles were lit on the cake tonight, I first noticed that they had been strategically placed around the perimeter such that there was no possible way to get more than one of them out at a time (I should now admit that there were only a symbolic five of them). Determined that no candle would be left standing, and their demise would be graceful and not the result of a harsh and untargeted blast of air, I planned my attack. I took two deep breaths, noting how much air I could fill my lungs with, and then, methodically, blew out each candle separately, a small puff of air for each, neatly snuffing them out one at a time. My kids had never seen (or heard) anything quite like it. No mighty blast of air, just an economical whutt, whutt, whutt, whutt, whutt and the flames were extinguished. Yes, Dad found a new way to blow out candles.

Taking stock of this 55 year old body, I note that it's worn fairly well over the years; no serious health issues, just some minor annoyances that have always been there (exercise induced asthma) and a slightly-sore left shoulder that's probably a result of bad posture at my desk at work. I can still ride easily 100+ miles without issue, and I really can't think of anything I could do at 20 that I can't do now (which could be an example of either denial or the beginning of brain rot). My weight is still a bit above ideal but below where it was when I was 35, held in check by the need to keep up on the climbs with guys who have a lot more time to ride than I do and seem to get faster as they get older. I do take more notice of "old guys" in the news, in their 80s and still running companies and doing important things in the world and think, wow, that's 25 years older than I am now, I'm not past my prime. I can still do things! That's not what I used to think. I used to think they were just old. :-)