



CHAPTER ONE

The End of the World

So look, you're fifty-three, fifty-eight, somewhere in there. Great guy, pretty successful. Good energy. You're a serious man in a serious life. And besides that, you're in decent shape, thank God. A solid, weekend athlete. Well, fairly solid. Maybe a little overweight and the bike's been in the garage awhile, but you could get back there in a heartbeat. You're Type A at work sometimes, but hey, you get stuff done. You are one of those people who not only had the gifts to do all right, you had the temperament to use them. Good for you.

And a couple of months ago, you open your eyes in the dark and say to yourself, "I am going to be sixty years old! I am almost sixty!" You're awake the rest of the night.

Or you're sitting in the office and some twerp is looking at you strangely. Looking through you, sort of. As if you weren't there. When he leaves, it hits you, "That guy thinks

I'm a short-termer. He thinks this is the Departure Lounge, the little punk." You go around your desk and sit in the chair where the kid just was. An involuntary sigh. "Retire! What the hell will become of me?"

Last one: You're at a party. A pretty woman goes by. Not that young . . . maybe thirty-eight. And she looks through you, too. Just does not see you. As if you were dead. As if you were sixty. Same thing. That night, in the dark again. "Sixty! I am going to be sixty years old!"

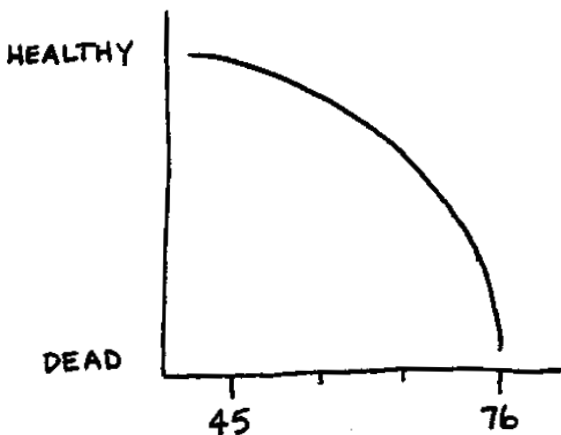
In the morning, you suck it up, go to work. Do your job. Just like the last thirty years. But it's there, man. It's there all the time: "I am going to turn sixty. What is to become of me? As if I didn't know."

But guess what? You *don't* know. The point of this book is that *you do not know*. And you have the wrong picture in your head. You know what it meant for your old man and his father . . . for your mentor and a few billion other guys. But the rules are changing. Right now. And your prospects are different. *Quite* different.

Harry—that's Henry S. Lodge, M.D., my doctor, my co-author, my close friend—is going to give you enough of the new evolutionary biology in his chapters so that you can understand for the first time how your body actually works. It is going to be a revolutionary insight for virtually everybody, believe me. Once you understand it, and once you do some of the things that will seem obvious to you after that—why, you can choose to live like fifty until you're in your eighties. In your eighties, my man! We mean it. You may ski into a tree; that's a different story. Or you may grow a tangerine in your brainpan and be dead in the morning. Fine. But most of us really do not have to age significantly. For decades.

It is better than that. Most of us can be *functionally younger every year for the next five or even ten years*. That sounds like cruel nonsense or hype, but it's true. Limited aspects of biological aging are immutable. Like the fact that your maximum heart rate goes down a bit every year, and your skin and hair get weird. But 70 percent of what you *feel* as aging is optional. You do not have to go there. No joke. No exaggeration, even. There's a new, tough game out there. And, congratulations, you are eligible to play. You just have to learn how.

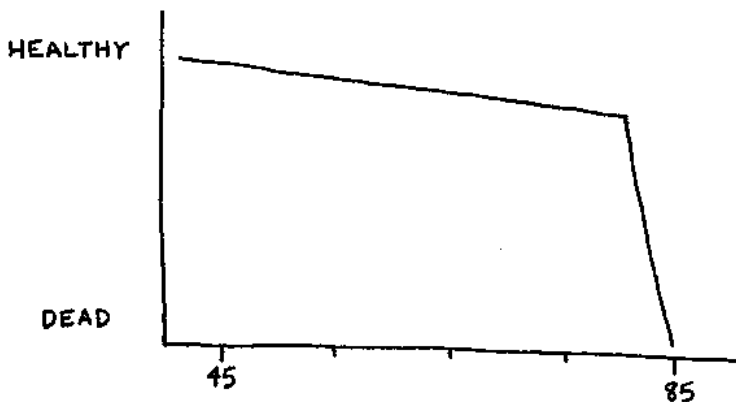
Here's what you think you know: You turn sixty and your feet are on the slippery slope—the long slide into old age and death. Every year a little fatter, slower, weaker, more pain-racked. You can't hear and you can't see. Your hips go. Your knees. And that great friend and amusing companion of your youth curls up and goes to sleep in your lap. Except when you have to take a leak, which is every half hour. You get petulant. Your conversation goes stupid. Your teeth are a bad yellow, and your breath isn't so great, either. You don't have any money. Or hair. And your muscles look like drapery. You give up. You sit there and wait. Go to the Nursing Home . . . get tied to a chair. Here's the graph:



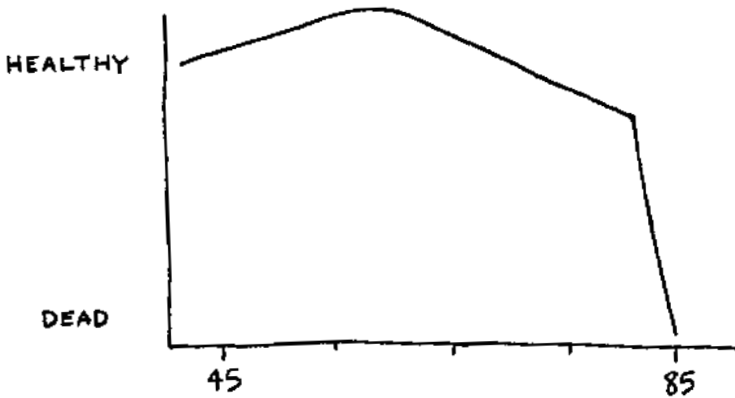
That can certainly happen. In this country, it often does. But it's a *choice*, not a sentence from on high. You can, just as easily, make up your mind—and tell your body—to live as if you were fifty, maybe even younger, for most of the rest of your life. If you're willing to send your body some different signals, you can get off the slippery slope. You can stay on a gently tipped plateau until you're eighty and beyond. There are guys out there skiing slalom races in their late eighties; I've seen it with my own eyes. And other guys that age who are biking in the steep hills outside Barcelona, where Lance Armstrong trains. Not just crawling along, either, like little old guys, but *doing it*. Going for it. Having a major good time.

And there are other old boys who are not interested in athletics but who are *still* in great shape and having a vigorous old age. So here's the lesson of the book: You do not have to get old the way you think. You can do all the same things, almost the same way. Bike, ski, make love. Make sense! Roughly the same energy, roughly the same pleasure. Roughly the same guy. In fact, if you're a bit of a mess right now, you can become a radically *better* guy over the next few years and *then* level off. No kidding.

At the worst, it can look something like this:



And for 95 percent of you it can look like this:



If you haven't been there, you cannot imagine how important the difference is between either of these last two curves and the one on page 5, because you probably can't imagine how bad "normal aging" is in this country. Take it on faith, it's bad, and the difference between the curves is profound. We are *begging* you, Harry and I, we are *begging* you to get off the slippery slope. It will make a fundamental change in the Next Third of your life.

Harry and I want this book to be fun for you. We want you to sail right through it before you realize just how serious we are. But let us have a candid moment. We are deadly serious. The stakes here—the potential changes in the rest of your life—are enormous. Think about the following numbers for a minute: Harry says that over 50 percent of all illness and injuries in the last third of your life can be eliminated by changing your lifestyle in the way we suggest. Not delayed until you're a little older. Eliminated! Along with all the misery, expense and lost joy that goes with being seriously sick or badly hurt. You may want to think about that for a minute. You may also want to think about the fact that 70 percent of

premature death is lifestyle-related. “Premature” means before you’re deep in your eighties.

Even more important, for me, is Harry’s statement that some 70 percent of the “normal” decay associated with aging—the weakness, the sore joints, the lousy balance, the feeling crappy—70 percent of that horror can be forestalled almost until the end. *That is a huge difference.* I had some interludes of normal aging in my life, when my joints hurt so much that regular walking was painful and I looked for the cutout in the curb so I wouldn’t have to step up three inches to get on the sidewalk. Think about that. Think about being so puny that you have to *rock* just a little to get out of a normal armchair. *That stuff happens. It will happen to you. It really, really will. And it doesn’t have to.*

All this sounds extreme, but it is not. Harry will tell you about the emerging science to prove it. It is head-turning. I will tell you about the life . . . about me skiing like a maniac at seventy . . . long, scary bike trips . . . *windsurfing*. Caring about stuff. Doing stuff. About getting functionally younger than I was ten years ago. About feeling great, most of the time. This is not chest-thumping nonsense from some old buffoon; this is the demo tape. *Listen, you can turn sixty and get functionally younger every year for the next five or ten years.* So this is serious business.

What I Bring to the Party: A Report from the Front

My part here is simple: I have lived through my sixties, and I have been retired for a while. At seventy, I have absorbed and followed the message of this book for a number of years, and I am prepared to tell you the exact truth about

the process. Mine is the report from the front. Optimistic, sure, but honest and unadorned.

And here's the good news. I have done pretty well. Not stunningly well: I am not forty. But I am, say, a reasonably healthy fifty. And this despite the following truths: I am an indifferent athlete at best. I am hugely self-indulgent (at one point I was forty pounds overweight). I drink almost every day and I am hardwired for pleasure. Absolutely hardwired. But once I got it into my head what the stakes were and how modest the commitment was—compared to the results—I was there. I did the “guy” thing that we all know about. I made a job of it. You know the mantra: “Suck it up, be a guy, do your job.” Oh, and show up every day. That's the one thing we all learned how to do in thirty years on the job. Bring that edge to bear on these new commitments and you have it made.

Here's another nice thing: The *process* isn't bad. Some of it—the exercise part, maybe—sounds appalling and you'll think we're kidding. But it isn't and we're not. I wouldn't have done some of the stuff for a month, let alone years, if it wasn't fun, but mercifully it is. Slightly addictive, as a matter of fact. We'll explain. It's tough, but it's fun, and it works.

What Harry Brings to the Party: The Truth

Harry is the real McCoy. A board-certified internist (and a gerontologist), he is, at forty-six, consistently ranked as one of the best doctors in America in national surveys. He is the head of a cutting-edge, twenty-three-doctor practice in Manhattan and on the clinical faculty of Columbia

University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. He is also a serious student of recent developments in cellular and evolutionary biology. His is the report on that science—which has not yet made its way into the medical journals and won't for a while—and on what he has learned from his own experience treating patients in their fifties, sixties and beyond for the last fifteen years. The science is heavy, but Harry makes it accessible and persuasive. Okay, sort of accessible. But when you read his chapters, the logic—indeed, the near-necessity—of embracing his suggestions doesn't sound crazy at all.

By the way, the science is sufficiently new that Harry—a profoundly conservative man in this area—warns that some of what he says may turn out to be wrong as research goes forward. But not the basic themes. The revolution he talks about is here, and the science is real. He makes it clear that there are remarkable forces in your body—in your cells, all over the place—that are constantly at work, building you up or tearing you down. Darwinian forces—preservation-of-the-species stuff—that have everything to do with who you are and how you live. In his chapters (we more or less take turns), he tells you what they are and how they work. He also tells you how to manipulate and redirect them to your own ends. Like holding age at bay to a remarkable extent and for a very long time. Not completely and not forever, but a lot more than you can believe right now.

What you'll learn is partly what you have always known: There are tides in our lives that carry us forward or back. When you're a kid, the tide is behind you and you go forward, no matter what you do. Stronger, more coordinated, better focused . . . better able to understand and cope. But at some point the tide inside your body goes slack and the free ride is over. And then, in an instant, it turns against you. You

get a little weaker, your balance is funny, your bones turn out to be frail . . . you can't remember things. And it begins to look as if before long the tide will be running pretty hard. And it's going to sweep you up on the rocks. Where the gulls are waiting. And the crabs. To eat your big fat gut. And your eyes. Take the guck out of your nose and your hair to make a nest. Go up there and eat you. Sorry.

But the interesting thing is that the tide is not that strong. It looks strong, because it's so steady, so remorseless. Yet it's manageable, in the sense that you can turn its relentless power to your own purposes. Like using the terrifying force of a wind that is rushing you toward the rocks to sail *into* the wind and safety. Harry is not a breezy guy, but he's awful smart and his stuff is worth a close study. All he wants you to do is change the way you live. Fundamentally and forever. Me, too.

Meeting Harry and Getting a New Start

I went to Harry because a pretty, redheaded skin surgeon named Desiree told me to. She had just taken off half my nose with a local anesthetic, and I was still crazy about her, which requires a certain charm. I had just moved back to New York from Colorado, where I'd gone to be a ski bum for a couple of years when I first retired. (I had missed that phase as a kid because I got married at nineteen and had three children before law school.) Anyway, I asked Desiree if she could be my doctor and she said no, but she had just the guy. Smart, decent . . . a terrific person. A WASP, she said, but not a dope, as if that had to be cleared up. He'd been her teacher of something in medical school and I'd like him.

So there I am in Harry's examining room, wary as a cat. Because (a confession) I don't like doctors. I don't like the haughty way they say, "Hi, Chris. I'm Dr. Smith." (I'm "Chris"? And he's "Dr. Smith"? What's that all about? And why do I always have to wait an hour to get this abuse? Lawyers don't do that. Doctors, man! And then the stuff they do to you!)

Harry has lovely manners and is a conspicuously decent guy. I am still wary. We've just been through all this terrible stuff. He's drawn gallons of blood, taken long, dubious looks in my ears and down my throat, asked lots of vaguely scary questions. And stuck his finger up my butt. Finally, it's the old "Why don't you put on your things and come into my office and we can talk a minute."

You just know he's going to say, "Uh, listen, I found a little lump up your butt . . . the size of a pomegranate, actually. Probably nothing, but there is some gangrene, so let's get you booked into the hospital and . . ." I go into his office, and no, he has not found the pomegranate yet. Actually, he says, I am in fairly good shape. Overweight but not bad. The fact that I get regular exercise helps a lot.

Harry is tall and oddly shy for a guy running this big practice. He looks at his computer a lot while he's talking to you. You wouldn't say nerdy, because he's actually kind of handsome, if you think about it . . . well, "nerdy" might cross your mind. He was an oarsman in college and looks it. But he dresses and carries himself so that I think "New England frump." Which, of course, is fine by me, because I look about the same. I once had a secretary who said, "Chris, you wear your clothes as if you hate them." Harry and I were cut from the same rumpled cloth in the same part of the world, the North Shore of Boston. We grew up five miles and twenty-five years apart. He drones on. Numbers, parameters. Blah, blah, blah.

Then, because I'm interviewing him for the important position of becoming my doctor, I say, "So, what is it about the practice of medicine that you like most?"

He stops, but only for a second, as if he'd been waiting to talk about it. "What I really like is the notion of long-term relationships with patients and keeping them in good health. Not just curing disease but promoting health, which is a different thing. I would like to help them have a better life, not just cure them of this and that."

Bingo! "What do you mean?" I ask innocently.

"Well, I've always been interested in aging as well as internal medicine. I actually got board-certified in both, although I'm not sure how separate gerontology is from internal medicine."

Then he turns and quietly drops the bomb.

"What I am sure of is that there is a fundamental revolution at hand in the way people age." He pauses and thinks how to get at it. "In the old days . . ." And he goes into the business about the slow, steady curve from fifty to death on the one hand and the new plateau on the other. Actually draws the lines in the air with his hand. "And you could be on the frontier of that change."

"Me?"

"Yeah. With your numbers . . ." He fools around with the computer. "Yup, this is pretty good. Uh, you don't smoke, and with these numbers and a more aggressive exercise habit, you could go on about the way you are today until you are, say, eighty. Maybe ninety. In fact, if you do a few things, you can actually be functionally younger. You're already in better shape than most of the men who come in here for the first time, but yes, you could be *younger next year* in all the ways that matter. Younger next year and for quite a few years to come."

I go over and sit in his lap. “True?”

“Yeah. You ski. Well, you can ski hard through your seventies. Slow down and eventually go to cross-country at some point in your eighties. Bike . . . you can do that forever. There will be a certain decline eventually, but basically you can be as athletic, vigorous and alert as you were at fifty until you’re eighty or older. And for the first five or more years you can be functionally younger.”

“What do I have to do?”

“It’s hard to summarize, but there are three things.” Did you ever notice how there are always three things? “Three things,” he says. “Exercise. Nutrition. And commitment.

“The biggest one—and the biggest change for most people—is exercise. It is the secret to great health. You should exercise hard almost every day of your life—say, six days a week. And do strength training. Lift weights, two of those six days. Exercise is *the* great key to aging. This long slide . . .” again, the arching curve with his hand in the air, “can simply go away. Or go up for quite a while. And you can be yourself for the rest of your life.”

I have about four hundred questions, but, uncharacteristically, I sit and wait.

Harry goes on. “Nutrition, too. You should eat the way you know you should eat but probably don’t. If you possibly can, you should get down to your true weight. You’re . . .” peek at the screen, “one ninety-four. You should be . . . what? What’s your normal weight? One seventy-five?”

“One sixty-five, I guess. Maybe less. I rowed a little in college at one fifty-five and weighed about that until I was in my forties.”

“Okay, if you could get back to one seventy someday, that would be great, but don’t stew about it. It’s much more important to exercise, regardless of what you weigh, and

then learn to eat rationally from here on out. Quit eating the things that you know are rotten for you, like fast food and lots of fats and simple carbs. And eat less of everything.” He says dieting is dumb and doesn’t work, but that my weight would drift down, over time, if I exercised the way I should and quit eating junk.

“How about genes? I thought this was all decided at birth, and I could just sit back and take my beating.”

“No,” Harry says emphatically. “That is a profound misunderstanding and a lousy excuse. Genes are maybe twenty percent of it. The rest is up to you.”

“Booze?”

He looks back at the screen again. “Social drinker,” he quotes me from the questionnaire. “Two drinks a night.” Then those lovely manners cut in, and he does not lean across the desk and shout “LIAR!” He just does the familiar thing about how a glass or two of wine is good but more than that is a negative. A lot more can be a real negative. Obviously.

“Commitment.” He shrugs, as if to say this next part is harder to talk about. “What I mean is, you have to be involved with other people. And you have to care about something. Goals. Charities . . . people . . . family . . . job . . . hobbies. Especially after retirement, you have to dig in and take hold or things can take some bad turns.” He stops, stuck for a minute, struggling a little. “It’s specific to you. And it’s awfully hard to generalize, but there have to be people and causes you care about. Doesn’t seem to matter much what the causes are. They don’t have to be important to society or make money, as long as they’re important and interesting to you. There have to be people you care about and a reason to keep yourself alive. If not . . .” a little smile, “you’ll die.”

“That’s it?” I ask.

“In a nutshell, yeah.”

“Okay.” I’m ready to go. “How much exercise? What do I eat?”

But that’s the rest of the book. You’re going to like it. It’s going to save your life.