4 ways to stay young like those Taco Bell seniors
Wherever you are on the spectrum, carpe diem

The good commercial, for those who didn’t see it during the Super Bowl on Sunday or on YouTube, was the Taco Bell ad in which Bernie Goldblatt and his buddies sneak out of their retirement home for a wild night on the town.

Over the course of their spree that night, they sneak into a swimming pool; they go disco dancing; one elderly woman has a dalliance in a bathroom stall with a much younger man; and Bernie gets his last name tattooed across his back. The old fogies finish off the night, much like my teenage sons, at Taco Bell before heading back to the Glencobrooke Retirement Home.

Now the truth of the matter is that this commercial is far from the truth, or at least far from the truth I know. When my father lived in an assisted living facility several years ago few, if any, of the residents had wild nights on the town such as that in the Taco Bell commercial. In fact, most of the residents were in bed by 7 p.m.

It is true that the residents did take road trips. However, all of these road trips were sponsored events. They would shuffle onto a bus to go on a whale watch, or watch the Pawtucket Red Sox, or grab a quick lunch at Hooters. And no one that I ever met there ever ate spicy food.

Still, the Taco Bell commercial strikes a chord. Who among us doesn’t want to be young at heart? Who among us doesn’t want to recapture a piece of the past, even if only for an evening? Who among us doesn’t want to throw caution to the wind and go wild every now and then?

Well, the answer is that all of us would like go on a spree like Bernie and his friends every now and then. Unfortunately some (or is it many?) of us don’t know what it would take be youthful again, even if means getting heartburn or throwing out your back.

What would it take? Who has the permission slips? Well, here’s what experts say you have to do to stay young in deed and thought.

Change your perspective

Annarose Ingarra-Milch has the main character in her novel, “Lunch with Lucille,” address the concept of youthfulness. Lucille, the nonagenarian, breaks it down to four diamonds or four valuable lessons.
The first diamond, said Ingarra-Milch, is all about changing our perspective. “If we see ourselves as old, we will act old,” she said. “We will focus on what we can’t do. What we have lost. And as a terrible consequence people will treat us as old folk, stick us in a corner, and ignore us.”

If, however, you change your perspective and see your age as something valuable, then it makes sense that the more years, the more value, Ingarra-Milch said. “The knowledge we have learned over our lifetime, our crystallized intelligence, is a priceless commodity and only gifted to a select few.”

In other words, how you see yourself is key to how others see and treat you. “If we see ourselves as fun-loving and adventurous, then others will too,” said Ingarra-Milch. “Going forward, think how the nurse will relate to Goldblatt and his crew should she become privy to their nighttime antics?”

**Let go of the past**

The second diamond is about letting go of the past, said Ingarra-Milch. “It is no secret that we live in a youth-centered culture,” she said. “Hell, we created it. Hide the gray. Get rid of the wrinkles. Look younger and be happy.”

You can certainly try and keep up with that to-do list, but it will be a losing battle. And that in turn will create stress.

The antidote, said Ingarra-Milch, is self-acceptance. “Enjoy where we are now,” she said. “Where ever we are on the adulthood spectrum, carpe diem.”

Her advice: Do new things, learn new ways of doing old things, taste different foods, sip different drinks, and read different genres of books.

“We still need to stay open to the smorgasbord of people and their ideas, no matter how kooky they may seem,” she said. “And of course, we must make an effort to be actively involved in what goes on around us—in our own health, our family, our community, and our world.”

**Have goals**

The third diamond, meanwhile, keeps us looking forward and into the future. “Having goals gives us a target,” said Ingarra-Milch.

To be fair, you don’t have to look down the road 10, 20 or 30 years as you once did. Your goals can be as short term as deciding what you will have for dinner tonight, what shoes you will wear tomorrow, what movie you will see next week, or in Goldblatt’s case, how you will sneak past the nurse’s station when it’s go-time. “Looking to the future allows us to continue moving,” she said. “We keep from getting stagnant. We keep questioning, ‘what else, where else, how else?’”

In the novel, for instance, the main character, Lucille, raises her glass each day at lunch and toasts “Cent’anni,” 100 years in Italian. “It is a goal she wishes for herself and each of her lunch companions,” said Ingarra-Milch. “Well, I figure that if we are looking to live to be 100 years old, there must be a lot of things we want to do before we get there.”

Others, by the way, are of the same opinion. Consider, for instance, the advice of Jim Stovall, author of the best-selling novel “The Ultimate Gift.” “People stay young as long as they have something to do, someone to love, and something to look forward to,” he said. “We stay young as long as we believe our best days are still ahead.”
George Kinder of the Kinder Institute of Life Planning also thinks it’s wise to ask yourself the following questions: What would you do if you had all the money you needed or all the time? What would you do if you had only five to 10 years to live? And, what would you regret not having done if you learned you only had one day left to live?

You might not head out to Taco Bell after asking yourself those questions, but odds are high the answers will help you focus on what’s important to you in your golden years.

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Develop a gratitude attitude

In Ingarra-Milch’s novel, Lucille recommends developing a gratitude attitude. The advice is this: Be thankful for what you have no matter how minor, for what you can do or still do, for the people in your life or the people you had in your life, or for whatever goes on in your day.

“Each and every day we must look to find what it is we appreciate and then remind ourselves of our good fortune,” said Ingarra-Milch. “This positive outlook, as the song goes, keeps us on the “sunny side of the street” and makes every day a celebration. It is no secret that people are attracted to positive, upbeat people. It is an easy way to keep our old friends close as well as attract new ones.”

Ingarra-Milch said Lucille’s four diamonds are fundamental best practices for keeping a youthful presence. And, she acknowledges that they do take effort and persistence to master.

“But we know that, we have lived long enough to know that everything worthwhile takes effort and persistence,” she said. “Changing our perspective, letting go of the past, making new goals, and choosing a positive attitude can turn anyone into a ‘Goldblatt.’”

Hats off to Taco Bell

And for what it’s worth, Ingarra-Milch also praised Taco Bell for airing the Bernie Goldblatt commercial. “Unfortunately, I, like many I suppose, have become accustomed to only seeing seniors in commercials hawking how to pay for their own funeral expenses, discreetly manage their incontinence, and yelling for help after they’ve fallen and can’t get up,” she said.

In fact, Ingarra-Milch said the commercial reminded her of her youth. “I thought back to when I was a teenager and right after Johnny Carson signed off, I would creep past my sleeping mother and out the back door to hang with my friends and be up to ‘no good,’” she said “Way to go Taco Bell for recognizing that age has nothing to do with wanting to have fun, laughing, smiling, playing, sharing time with friends, taking risks, and (still) bucking the system.”

Robert Powell is editor of Retirement Weekly, published by MarketWatch.

This article has been modified to scale