

## Billy's Explanation of Time

Ever noticed as we get older, time changes? When I say, "Just a minute," it seems to stretch into an hour these days. When I was a kid, a Saturday seemed to last forever. Now, weeks pass without notice. A daylong drive in the car is nothing these days, why did it seem so long when I was a kid? And Christmas – I seem to be buying Christmas presents all the time. How was it always so far away when I was young? My friend Bill Whitman explained it to me.

As a 40 year old, (well that and a little more, but the math is easier if we pretend I am still 40) my entire life experience is 40 years long. Ten years is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of my life, a year is  $\frac{1}{40}$ , a day is  $\frac{1}{14600}$ , an hour is  $\frac{1}{350400}$ , and a minute is a mere  $\frac{1}{21024000}$  slice of my life. Imagine, a minute is less than 1 twenty millionth of my life. No wonder they go by so fast. If Christmas is 6 months away, that's  $\frac{1}{80}$  of my life away – not so long as I can't wait.

Now let's look back at when I was a mere boy of 10. 10 years was my whole life. A year was fully  $\frac{1}{10}$ , a day was  $\frac{1}{3650}$ , an hour  $\frac{1}{87600}$ , a minute  $\frac{1}{5256000}$ . If Christmas was 6 months away, that's  $\frac{1}{20}$  of my life – fully 4 times longer than it takes to arrive now that I'm 40.

Consider me at 5 (yes, I was certainly cute). 10 years was twice my entire life in duration. A year was only  $\frac{1}{5}$  my lifetime, day drops to only being  $\frac{1}{1825}$ , an hour  $\frac{1}{43800}$ , a minute  $\frac{1}{2628000}$ . A year was twice the perceived length for me at 5 than at ten, and fully 8 times longer than my years are today. The same went for days and weeks. A day long sail for me at 40 would have been perceived by me at 5 to be over a week in duration (remember that next time your kids ask, "Are we there yet?") My dad took us on week-long car trips when I was this age, and I remember them as seeming to last forever. Now I understand that they did – a week-long trip for a 40 year old is a two month long perceived time trip for a 5 year old. A Christmas 6 months distant was  $\frac{1}{10}$  of my life away – truly forever.

When I was a baby of 1, a minute was fully 40 times longer to me than it is now. When it took my mom just a minute of her time to change my dirty diaper, I had to sit in poo for over half an hour my time. When I was thirsty I had to wait almost 2 hours my time for mom to warm the bottle in 3 minutes of her time. Of course I cried, I was bloody thirsty.

Something Billy did not present, but I do for further understanding (or confusion as the case may be), is that we all maintain a self-image set in stone somewhere during puberty. When we think of ourselves, we think of how we were then (my own mental image is somewhere around 16). We compare ourselves in the mirror to what we were at that time, we compare our waistlines to what they were then (arrg), we think of how fast we could run then, how long we could hold our breath, etc. We are also stuck thinking about

time then. In other words, even though my life experience at 40 says a minute is near one third as long as it was when I was 16, I still plan tasks on the shorter time. As a result, when I think something will take me an hour to accomplish invariably it takes over 3. Thanks to Billy, I can now overcome my tendency to underestimate time. Now, once I estimate how long something will take I factor in the time stretch.

I have not done Billy's elegant discussion justice, and I apologize. Since I can't get him to write it down, this is the best I can do. Still, I am hopeful that the crux of his explanation has made it through. Billy's discourse changed the way I see the world. I am much more mindful when dealing with children now, I factor in their longer time perception. And I have managed to use this in time planning for myself more also. Perhaps you can too.