

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

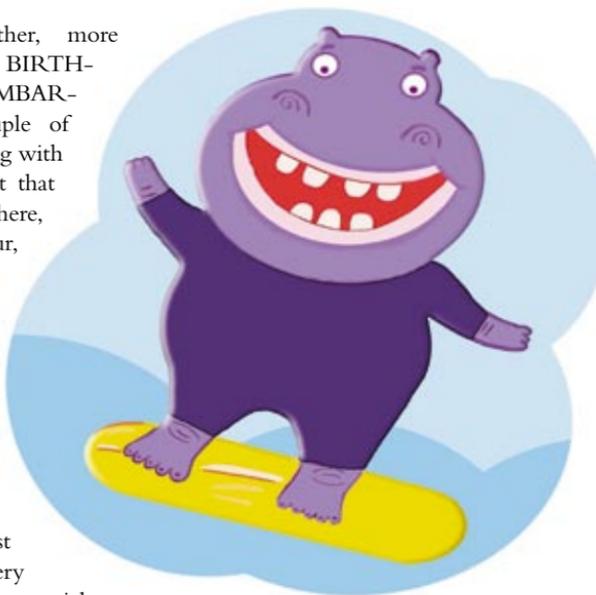
The Wetsuit

The older I get the less excited I get about my birthdays. Because each birthday reminds me that I've now used up more years than I've got left. My future is stretching further and further out behind me. I'm closer to my death than I am to my birth. And my children are starting to look middle-aged!

But there's another, more serious, reason: BIRTH-DAYS ARE EMBARRASSING! Like a couple of years ago, when celebrating with my family in a restaurant that shall remain nameless. There, in the menu, on page four, in extra-large print, were these discounted meals for people 55 years and over!

"Hey Dad," some smart person said. "You now qualify!" And they all giggled. But I didn't think it was funny. I mean, I'm 57, not 97! And the last thing I need (thank you very much) is a special price for special meals where the meat is chopped up small and the veges are mashed so you can strain them through your gums!

On another more recent birthday, they gave me a nostril-hair trimmer. That's right – a dinky little chrome-plated, battery-powered nostril-hair trimmer. "A weed-eater for an old man!" another



smart person quipped. And the entire family found it hysterically funny.

But my birthday-embarrassment reached new heights this year when my wife bought me a wetsuit ...

Awetsuit is not what I would have chosen. I would've preferred a couple of good books. Or a night

DON'T CRY BECAUSE IT'S OVER – SMILE BECAUSE IT HAPPENED.

in a nice motel. But my wife thought it might inspire me to go snorkelling with the grandkids. And she reminded me that, last time I braved the open sea, I got so cold that my torso turned purple and my nipples threatened to snap off.

The wetsuit she'd chosen was a Ripcurl (to make me feel young), and a size 'L' (to make sure it would fit). But it didn't. No matter how hard I pulled on that black rubber, I couldn't get it past my waist let alone up over my shoulders.

"We'll just exchange it for a bigger size," she said, reassuringly. Which is how I came to spend the afternoon of my birthday humiliating myself in the very small fitting room of a very large department store.

My wife found an XL on the wetsuit rack, and together we wrestled it up to my armpits. But my manly bosoms still oozed dangerously out the top, and the pressure on my ribcage made it hard to breathe.

We tried a XXL (*can you believe this?*).

And by crouching in the foetal position I managed to get my arms and shoulders in. But when I tried standing up, the stretchy stuff wouldn't let me. And with the blood all squeezed to my head, I was getting a migraine.

A skinny young salesman offered to help. And together we shoved my protesting body into a cheaper, less popular wetsuit that had neither legs nor arms.

I looked awful – like a hippo in a leopard. But by then I was desperate: "Who cares?"

So I asked the young salesman to unzip me, my wife helped me yank it off, we paid our money, thanked him profusely and took the stupid thing home.

If you should see me on the beach this summer, please don't laugh. Just help me with the zip! ❁

JOHN COONEY, GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR, BELIEVES THAT YOUTH IS WASTED ON YOUNG PEOPLE. "FORGET ABOUT THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH," HE SAYS. "WE NEED A FOUNTAIN OF OLD!"

THORT



"I got some bad news today. You know the money you get from those ATM machines? It comes from YOUR account!"