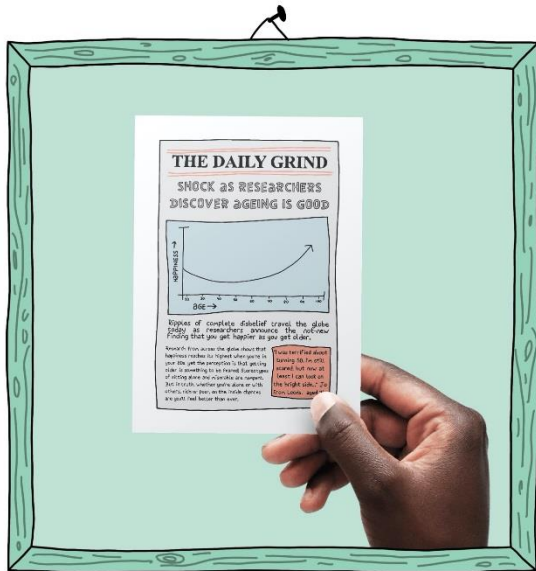


A make-over for your next birthday (card)

A creative collaboration between [CPA](#), [WIGS](#) and [Danger Doodles](#)
Written by Hannah McDowall (WIGS) & Dave Martin (CPA)



How are you feeling about your next birthday?

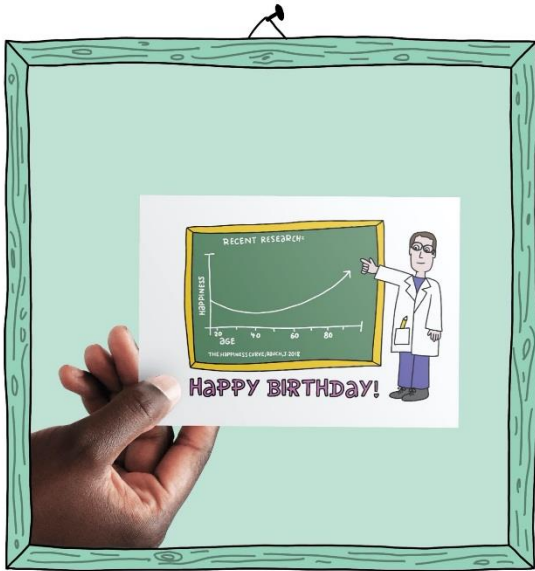
Once past the jelly and musical statues stage it gets complicated doesn't it. Whilst being alive is (mostly) good, getting closer to death carries the tang of fear. For before the big death there are many 'mini-deaths' to get through; the end of primary school, the end of being 'young' (turning 30 can be a particular crisis moment) the end of

fertility, the end of having children at home, the loss of parents, the loss of a sense of endless possibilities, and so on. These are legitimate feelings. Loss brings grief. But loss also creates fallow space in our lives into which something new will come. Both are true. The challenge is to carry them both well, acknowledging what has been lost and welcoming what is arriving. And for that we need sufficient hope that new life is coming even if we don't know in what form it comes.

One of the things that accompanies us in the movement from loss to new-arriving is the implicit and explicit culture of anti-ageing we live in. We learn, as small children, to become ageist (about ourselves, let alone other people) from family and friends, and are constantly told through advertising, culture and politics that to be young is good and to get old is not, that to age is to decline, is to 'lose' youth, vigour and opportunity¹. Just start looking and you'll see it everywhere.

¹ Officer, A. & de la Fuente-Núñez, V. (2018) A global campaign to combat ageism, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2018;96:299-300. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.17.202424>

How might our anti-aging culture arrest our hopeful movement to where new life may be arising for us at any age? A fair bit it seems. Having a negative attitude towards your own ageing takes 7.5 years on average off your life expectancy compared to those who are more positive, and persistent messaging about loss of health, social connection, mobility and income experienced in later life (none of which are inevitable) doesn't bring hope². But back to birthdays.



Birthday cards are one place where we see a spark of recognition that having a past, present and future brings complicated feelings including a sense of loss. We say spark, but maybe a fizzle is more truthful, because this recognition can become so mangled by our anti-aging cultural that the hope and newness present across our lives gets rinsed out, as if we each have an allocation which runs dryer and dryer, like a fading battery, as our life

progresses. Which is utter nonsense.

There are cards for sale which mock people and their age, that commiserate and pity or try to help hide, or pretend it's not so bad, suggest that drowning your sorrows is a good way forward or deny it's really happening for 'there's still life in the old dog yet' etc. You probably know exactly what I am talking about, google 'old age funny cards' and you will get an eyeful.

And we still feel obliged to be complicit in tittering, and so accept this abuse. Such cards ask us to simultaneously agree with the embarrassment and misery of getting older, whilst also putting our best foot forward and clinging to youth for all we are worth (I mean, just look at those Hollywood stars in their 60s!). But of course we can't cling on,

² Will Horwitz (2014) Looking Forward to Later Life: Taking an early action approach to our ageing society. Community Links, Early Action Taskforce https://s27436.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/LATER_LIFE_web.pdf

so we have failed, and next birthday we will have failed a bit more (enter another round of life-deriding birthday cards).

Although we may see these cards as just a bit of fun which shouldn't be taken seriously, they are serious, for they express the social agreement that ageing is bad and all about loss. In reality they are a cry for help, they say 'We are scared of loss and we don't know what to do'.

It is a massive job to unpick the cultural narrative that getting old is bad. Because we start believing it so early (as young as 4)³, the unpicking needs to start early too. Trying to mop up the mess with 'be positive' anti-ageism messaging to the 50+ is just too late, we are well and truly practiced in denying and indulging our age-related fears by then.

But birthday cards offer a playful and creative place to start.

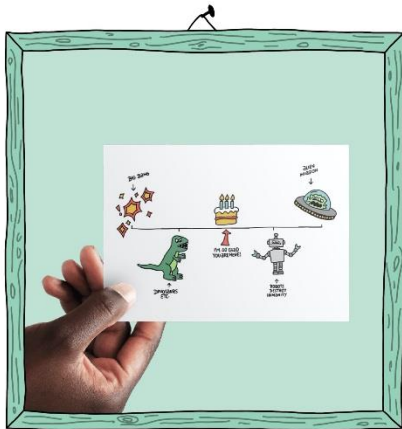
What would a hope-inspiring birthday card, which also speaks to the experience of ageing, look like?

Well first of all it needs to be nice, beautiful or funny. Nobody wants to give or receive a birthday card that is an educational lecture on positive ageing. Secondly it needs to be for everyone, not a special 'chin-up' card for older people, as being targets, even for positive messages, just reinforces the same problem (ie. old = bad, therefore you need some extra cheer via this card). So the card must be for people of all and any age. Third, it needs to directly speak to the experience of ageing or challenge fearful attitudes towards ageing, rather than being 'ageing-neutral' as the millions of cards which carry a nice picture and blank inside already do perfectly well. That's the design brief we set ourselves.

Working with professional doodler Jen Danger of [Danger Doodles](#) we have now developed our first three designs. It has been humbling and enlivening to explore images and words together, the brief has prompted us to think very deeply about what we are saying and showing how it might land for different ages.

³ Levy B. Stereotype embodiment: a psychosocial approach to aging. *Curr Dir Psychol Sci.* 2009 Dec 1;18(6):332–6.

From October 1st 2020 you can join us in celebrating ageing across the life course by purchasing these cards, whether you are buying a card for a 3-year-old or 80-year-old. We hope these card designs offer a spark of hope and insight for the year to come. You can pre-order them now from the danger doodles website - just click on the images below. But they will not arrive immediately as we will be printing at the end of October so are likely to arrive with you in early to mid-November.



See below the current selection and link to website:

<https://dangerdoodles.com>

Socials:

Fb: <https://www.facebook.com/dangerdoodles>

IG: <https://www.instagram.com/jendangerdoodles>

Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4Q6MKzvMyuvU7x2hkxZSkA>