It’s the end of summer, September, and it's cold and rainy. The sun goes down at 5 p.m. instead of 9, and the commercials now are full of Halloween decorations and back-to-school sales. The rain smelled like dead skin cells preparing a new layer of skin for the season, layered with a foul smell. It's the universe reminding us that time waits for no one. I stepped out of my car, watching the rain rush into my Crocs, flooding them, making both feet extremely wet. They were sticky and stuck, like intruders breaking into your most valuable belongings. The wetness felt like a cold hug, hugging my feet, reminding me that summer was over and here to stay.

Two seconds later, my feet were on Walmart floors. The bottom of my shoes was making the noises of duck feet. The reality of diversity in the store hit like a storm no one saw coming, where children are allowed to get all the snacks they please. Their screams reached from the roof to the bottom of the floors. This is a place where feet from all kinds of lives walk, where cheap prices are consistently going up now, and where you bump into people you may know and many people you don't. When I looked up, you were someone I didn't know, but you had the sense of humor like you knew me. When we locked eyes, we were both in the oral care aisle searching for what we needed but couldn't seem to find, cart to cart. It was an instant connection of laughter.

I was looking for toothpaste and thought I was in your way. You didn’t smile at first; your face was labeled with all sorts of emotions that I couldn’t comprehend, like shapes drawn in places they didn’t belong. I heard you apologize to some people because you thought you were in their way. When I said I was sorry, you joked, “No, I'm sorry; I'm the one who left my toothbrush.” We both laughed at something that happens more than we think. I noticed the crease in your white t-shirt and your polka dot Capris. The stillness of your grey hairs danced in Walmart's dull air amid the noisy wetness.

When I saw you, it reminded me of how much of a blessing it is to see old age, something people my age joke about, make fun of, and, to be honest, dread getting there —the stories you carry on your back resting to fall off to someone young. The good stories give you happiness, but the bad ones give you joy because you wouldn’t know how to live without them. Too many people often overlook older people, for all kinds of reasons; the popular one lately is that you guys move too slowly. That is true, but no one knows how fast-paced you had to walk when you were young and how much walking you had to do to move slowly now. That’s the wisdom I saw while looking at you.

I often wonder how old age will look on me, how it will treat me, and most importantly, how it will make me feel. I grew up around people who looked old. I never knew why, but life knocks some people down sometimes. Seeing you reminded me that aging doesn't have to look like that. I can come up with my own defined version of it without outside noise.

It can embody joy, calmness, and peace. You made me realize that I don't have to be afraid; I have to welcome it. Welcoming it loosens the fear, like how untied shoes allow us to step out of them and embrace our bare feet on the solid ground, still allowing us to walk differently. I will allow old age to make me wiser, allow me to prosper, and allow me to enjoy and smell the fruit that it grows.

So, thank you for forgetting your toothbrush on that rainy day. For showing up in the same aisle as me while meeting my eyes as if you were telling me to allow you to become my teacher. For showing me that what's silver can sparkle. I've learned that strangers can teach you a lot if you are open to learning even in the quiet moments, even in those corners where you are doubtful of yourself. These times teach us the most when fearful, negative thinking, and uncertainty hit hard. These times teach us to be strong and stand on our own feet.

Oh, look, we meet again, but this time we are now friends. The rain feels different, like it knew we would meet again. It's warmer and more familiar on my skin. I didn't wear my crocks; my feet were strapped in my shoes as I left work. Who knew it would rain again after three days since I first met you? Thank you for telling the rain to meet me again

clearly I was right about you.