

Making concessions

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'Pensioner' is such a loaded term, muses Brad Johnston, particularly when you're an apparently healthy 38-year-old.

Having spent weeks jumping through municipal hoops to prove my identity to our government (they should add the 'Quadruple Centrelink' to the gymnastic repertoire), I qualified for disability support early last year - thanks to my lovely case worker and brutally frank medical report: 'AIDS Category 4'.

As confronting (not to mention retro) as that assessment was, it was the thought of being in possession of – no, *owning* – a pensioner card that filled me with a vague, grey dread, not unlike the dust that forever accumulates in the corners of my overpriced bachelor pad.

While I'm happy to let the dust gradually gather on the parquetry like friendly mildew (I'm totally with Quentin Crisp on this issue), the card – the Pensioner *Concession* Card, for fuck's sake – conjured up if not horror, then at least the level of anxiety one might feel at, say, a deep suburban bucks' night.

It's almost a pity, then, that the *Pensioner Concession Card* itself is so underwhelming. Tellingly, its boldest element is the expiry date. A plain, little affair, flimsy, in an ugly- school-uniform palette of plum and powder blue, it lurks in my wallet like an embarrassing acquaintance, only to meet the disinterested face of the occasional transit employee or health professional.

I've never seen my father's card and mum has only furtively displayed hers on occasion when we've caught the bus together, but I never got a good glimpse. And now I think I know why. I presume she's not horrified by the colour scheme, but I do get a strong sense that she is bothered by the concept of ageing, of which this card is a potent, albeit homely, symbol.

For me it means something else entirely. Mine has that tiny, yet all-important 'DSP' – Disability Support Pension. I am discreetly disabled.

What a shame I'm not actually receiving the pension. These days I work part-time: more hours than the pension allows; not enough to keep me afloat. I am also just above the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation's financial support threshold. Bugger.

Going on the pension looks better all the time, the more I think about it. But why does it feel wrong? Would it be like wearing a sweater with a big embroidered 'L' (and not for "Laverne")?

I was genuinely ill, after all. At one stage I'd even started mentally writing an adventure about my lingering T-cells: Timmy, Tammy, Tommy and T'Wanda: The Cautionary Foursome. Enid Blyton directed by John Waters.

I must admit I do have moments when I feel, *goddammit*, I *should* get something out of this fucking [virus](#) [1]A small infective organism which is incapable of reproducing outside a host cell.. I deserve that pension! But I'm never quite convinced.

After almost 18 years of fear and uncertainty, punctuated by the occasional health scare, I'm a little exhausted by the subject. Or maybe just over it. The future faded some time ago and now I have the opportunity to forgo uncertainty to a degree. I do hate uncertainty.

Think about it. I could get a regular income for which I merely have to be terminally ill (done!). I could go everywhere doing very little (interesting...) or I could just visit every gay bar, share my poignant travails and live on pity schooners.

Indeed, I can convince myself that there is a certain anti-glamour (call it bleak chic) which genuinely appeals. But I can't ignore the reality. The pension simply isn't enough to live life as I know it. And the thought of jumping on the Centrelink train frightens the hell out of me - with its sense of self-fulfillment and all-round existential griminess.

To be honest, I'm not sure how much further I can lower my expectations.

On the plus side, my parents and I would have one more thing in common.

- [Disability Support Pension](#)
- [stopping work](#)

Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/125>