

Bill Rea ? I'm not a senior yet

I guess this was a moment that comes to every man who lives to comb grey hairs, and those of you who know me know I crossed that milestone many years ago (my late father hit that mark when he was much younger than I).

It's as inevitable as aches and pains and creaking joints, all of which I have.

But there must also be the moment of truth, and I faced that during the last couple of weeks.

It was the annual trip to the Canadian National Exhibition for my wife and I.

I do know that I'm getting to the point where people are going to start asking me if I qualify for a 'seniors' rate' when trying to get into certain facilities. I actually find it a little amusing, although occasionally, when I'm in a beer or liquor store, I find myself longing for the days when I would be asked to produce some ID. People mistaking me for a senior is getting more common as time goes on.

There's a children's entertainer who once expressed appreciation for the coverage I had given him, offering to perform for my grandchildren (of which I have none) when I gave the word.

Hey, all you Baby Boomers out there! In case you haven't had experiences like that yet, you have some fun to which to look forward.

I was talking to my brother on the phone one day last fall, and he was talking about his 'life-altering' experience. He went to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto (where we both were raised and where he still resides). He sounded somewhat perturbed that he was allowed into the festivities by paying the proverbial 'seniors' rate.' Yet he followed the path of least resistance, paid it, and carried on with his mid-life crisis.

Various facilities and events have different definitions when it comes to 'seniors.' There's a facility where Beth and I sometimes go swimming, and they offer reduced rates to people who are 55. Since I passed that milestone earlier this year, I have no trouble availing myself of the benefits that come from it.

On the other hand, I'm perfectly happy to wait for other opportunities that the elderly in our society get to save money. Who wants to be rushed into old age?

Ordinarily, I would have had a media pass to get into the Ex, but I didn't have one this time (oh, all right, I forgot to apply for one ? senility can be a rough thing to go through, you know). Indeed, there used to be a time when I was able to drive right into the media parking area, and that would put both myself and all in the car into the grounds. I did that the first time Beth and I went to Ex together, and was she ever impressed! A parking pass can be an effective courting tool, in the right hands and used properly. But those days are in the past.

So we headed to the big city realizing we would both have to pay our way to get in. Not really a big deal.

The cost at the gate is \$16 for adults, which is what Beth is and I pretend to be, and we both noticed that people aged 60 or older get in for just \$12.

'I'm willing to wait five years,' I said to Beth as we took note and walked up to the ticket booth.

'Two adults,' I told the young woman behind the glass.

'Two seniors, that's \$24,' she quickly replied.

'Not yet,' I said. 'We're not seniors yet.'

'You can pass for 60,' she shot back, as I resisted the temptation to get indignant. 'I'm trying to save you some money.'

Now I enjoy the thought of saving money as much as the next man, but there is only so far I will go. I like to think of myself as an honest man, and accepting considerations to which I am not yet entitled does seem inconsistent to that, does it not? Besides, I'll be in my declining years soon enough, and I don't need to be pushed into old age by some young whippersnapper who's landed herself a job for the last couple of weeks of summer.

I started digging in my heels, but she started doing the same.

I guess there comes a point when argument becomes a waste of time, and I had the feeling this conversation had reached the point. I paid the reduced rate she was asking for, pocketed my change and did my best to forget the whole thing.

Although I have to confess, what this girl's boss would have thought of her giving away deals like that kept popping into my head. I don't think the CNE is doing so well that it can afford to let too many aspiring geriatrics like me in at rates they don't yet deserve.

After we got home that evening, Beth seemed more disturbed about what had happened than I. In one sense, she had a pretty good reason. I'd be in very deep trouble if I mentioned her age in this space, but suffice to say she's a couple of years younger than I, meaning the girl in the ticket booth advanced her time on this earth a lot more than she did mine.

Every now and then, I have to put on my gallant act. If someone wants to mess around with my age, I can handle it. But they will

have to leave my wife alone. I have to toss in lines like that because Beth reads these columns of mine.

Besides, I have had plenty of practice over the years. Going prematurely grey probably helped. It was my barber at the time who notice my first grey hair when I was at the tender age of 25. I was so devastated at the time that I switched barbers.

But over time, I found I was able to live with it. Indeed, I vowed many years ago that I would never try to adjust the colour of my hair. I resolved if I had to go grey, then I would do it as graciously as possible. And if I were to lose most of my hair (which is what happened to my father), then I would go along with that, without bothering with hair pieces, etc. I figured it would be easier to just accept what fate had planned for me than worrying about fighting it. I also think it helps preserve one's dignity.

Besides, in five years, I'm going to be entitled to those special rates to get into the CNE, and by then, I'll be ready to claim them. I don't want some kid in a ticket booth trying to tell me I'm too young just because I look it.

But if a clerk in the beer store wants to give me such static, bring it on

