

Crusty old codgers

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I pulled into a gas station the other week to put fuel in the truck and get a coffee for the road.

While I was filling up, a pickup truck pulled into the spot on the other side of the fuel pump.

The windows were open and I heard the driver say, 'Do you want to get a coffee Dad?'

The older man in the passenger seat barked out 'rarr rarr rarr rrrrrr!' or something to that effect.

I couldn't really understand what he said because it came out as more of an angry growl than a reply to a question about whether he wanted to get a hot beverage.

After fueling I went inside, paid for my coffee, and got in line at the Tim Hortons On the Run counter.

The two men from the truck were in line ahead of me looking at the baked goods displayed behind the glass.

'Do you know what you want Dad?' The younger man asked.

The father replied 'rrrrrr rarr rarr rarr rrrrrr rrrrrrr!!!' or something to that effect.

At this point I was kind of amused. That guy is what a lot of people would call 'crusty.' That seems to be the best word that describes these guys who are apparently angry at the world.

It was what happened next that really caught my attention.

The son leaned over to his father and quietly and politely, but firmly said, 'I asked you a simple question. There's no need for you to respond like that.'

The older man replied 'rarr rarr,' but now a lot quieter and with less of a bark than before.

The question is, who are these guys, and at what point in life do they go from being that smiling freckle-faced kid sitting beside you in the next row in your grade five class to being a 'crazy old codger'?

I have never understood how people enter into a certain age and slip into an eternally grouchy state of mind.

Was this man a crusty, miserable man when he met his son's mother? If he was, why would she take up with such a person? Or was he a nice guy and at some point the switch was flipped to 'geezerhood'?

A good friend of mine had four children, the oldest being university age.

Unfortunately they had a crusty old guy as neighbour living across the street. He was loud and abusive to most people on the street, although his wife barely said a peep and rarely ventured outdoors.

The neighbours mockingly referred to him as the 'mayor' of the street. He made it his business to patrol the area looking for infractions.

My friend's son would quite often have his friends over to the house. They would sometimes park in front of the house and decide what they were going to do.

This would prompt the neighbour to come out of his house, yelling for them to disperse as he figured three or four guys together would apparently be plotting to rob a bank or cause civil unrest somewhere.

The thing was, they were all nice guys. They were all employed or going to school and planning careers.

One particular day, his friends arrived and the three of them were standing in the driveway talking.

The crusty old neighbour came out of his house and demanded they disperse. They smiled and waved and continued talking.

The crusty old guy got louder.

At this point my friend had just enough of this crazy old guy. She marched out front and asked him why he was yelling.

He told her he didn't like gangs hanging around on the street and they should leave.

She firmly told him they weren't a gang, they were on her property, and she had no problem with her son and his friends carrying on a normal conversation. She told the 'mayor' to get lost and stay in his own house.

He retreated rather quickly, while his wife peeked at the action from behind the curtains.

I worked with a woman who entered the 'crusty' phase rather early in life. Seems she had some young new neighbours.

One day at lunch she was complaining that these people had a party every weekend and they should be doing something else with their lives.

Finally, one of the other women at the table said, 'Let's see, young couple, early twenties, enjoying life? What do you expect them to do? Have quilting bees and listen to Lawrence Welk music?'

I've never understood how some people seem to wallow in misery.

As a wise man once said, 'Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.'