

Age comes like a thief, so I'll take a discount

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By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune



Up Front/Commentary

Friends of mine - older than I - have assured me there are benefits to growing older. But I never experienced this myself until recently, when I went to a movie and realized I was eligible for the senior citizen discount.

I was all set to pay the \$8.50 regular charge when I looked at the price list and saw that, based on the fact that I am 55, I needed to pay only \$6. How thrilling. I paid the ticket, bought a soda and strutted into the theater as if I'd just found money on the sidewalk.

Then it hit me. When I told the ticket clerk I was eligible for the senior discount, she simply nodded and took my money. She did not even ask to see my identification.

I don't know quite how to take that. Instead of money on the sidewalk it turned out to be more like Monopoly money.

Was there truly no question in her mind that I might have been lying about my age just to get the discount? It's not that I am a prideful or overly vain person. Well, OK, maybe I am. But I have always thought that I look pretty good for my age. Not that my age is bad, but it's older than, say, 35, which is what a delightful young man I had lunch with awhile back thought I was.

"You're 55?" he asked in sincere - at least well practiced - disbelief. "Gee, I thought you were about 35." I think he had been poised to ask me for a date, although he quickly backed out of that once he realized I am older than his mother. But it didn't matter - the important part of that conversation was the unintended compliment.

I have been in bars and asked to show my driver's license before buying a drink. When I looked at the waiter in surprise he explained: "We're required by law to ask everybody."

"Hey, don't apologize," I said. "I'm grateful to be asked."

I have been told by my many older friends that I really need to get over myself and recognize that becoming a bona fide senior citizen is nothing to be ashamed of. Take advantage of it, they advise. Get the AARP card - the magazine is great. And collect on the discounts - the restaurants, the hotel rooms, the movie tickets, the Friday buffets.

Until I went to the movie I had not yet done any of those things. It seemed a little deceitful to me, when I feel as youthful as I do, to pass myself off as a senior citizen just to save a few extra bucks.

I guess I had figured that once I made the decision to jump aboard the Magic Bus with the rest of those geezers somebody would at least ask to look at my pass. I did not think people would just assume I was old enough to be running with the big dogs.

It's unsettling to know there is a whole generation of people coming up who look at you in a new light that is not altogether kindly. So it's a good thing they at least compensate us with the senior discounts.

Hedberg may be contacted at khedberg@camasnet.com or (208) 983-2326.