

Commentary Bill Hall Am I old enough for socialism?

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

On two occasions lately, I have rudely challenged the age of female friends, and they both forgave me for my uncouth mistake.

In each case, my victims said they were retiring. But they looked so young. I immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were retiring early and gambling on not needing health insurance before reaching 65 when they would become eligible for Medicare.

They both assured me they actually are 65 already. They qualify now for Medicare, not to mention entering their gravy years on Social Security.

They could tell I wasn't merely pretending to guess low on their ages just to ingratiate myself with them. "No," each one insisted. "I really am 65."

So I was wrong. But no apology was necessary. They were kind and generous enough to hold no grudge against me for believing that they were years younger than their actual age.

Many women in this era of growing equality for members of the female gender have become less touchy about revealing their actual ages whether they look as old as they are or not. Nonetheless, most of us, myself included, don't mind revealing our true age even if somebody were so blind and stupid as to doubt that I am old enough for senior medical care.

With all due respect to those women of 65 who appear to be so young, it occurs to me that part of the reason I thought they weren't eligible for federal funding is because I am now 11 years beyond Medicare eligibility and 11 years older than they are.

As people grow older, our appearance makes age a comparative matter. It has always been that way while going gray and obeying the pull of gravity on our gradually more dangly bodies.

For instance, when I was 6, a 16-year-old was a virtual adult. Teens were big as adults, bossy as adults and, yes, on occasion, protective and loving as adults - even if 40-year-old parents of a teen have experienced days when they thought 16-year-olds seemed to remain virtual children.

Similarly, if you are 20, a 40-year-old can appear a bit overripe. But if you are 65, a 40-year-old is a young and fabulous sight.

And then you turn 76 like me and all of a sudden, out of the blue gray, a 65-year-old looks far too young to be eligible for Medicare.

If you keep that up, going from 70 to 80 and beyond, sooner or later, practically everybody in the world looks and acts younger than you. That's partly because of Shakespeare's rule: We begin our lives as babies and we become virtual babies again somewhere down the line.

But most of us are never 100 percent old. Most of us are never free of our inner child. In later years, we may dwell a bit more on serious matters, but with the help of crazy cats, bounding dogs and our own small giggly grandchildren - not to mention unintentionally hilarious members of the U.S. House of Representatives - we have much to laugh at late in life.

~~Life is full of jokes and jokers who would make a child laugh. We elders are no exception if we dare to be young. And I dare you not to be.~~

For instance, what is funnier than all these people toppling into old age, growing grumpy and angrily denouncing rampant socialism in the nation - while pouncing eagerly on the blatant socialism that floods our old lives with Medicare and Socialized Security?

Frankly, I am not embarrassed to be among them. Ask me if I am a socialist or I am a capitalist, and I will answer "yes." I would hate to see government take over true capitalism like corporations, stores, coffee, pizza joints and brassiere factories.

But I would also hate to see capitalism take over the fire department, the military, the public schools or, god forbid, health care.

Meanwhile, 50-year-olds, who carry the load most of us once carried, now speak darkly of doing something about the current excess of Social Security and Medicare. When they reach 65, they may still be screaming their lungs out, but they will find the senior safety net more tolerable than they do now.

There will even come a day, as 65 becomes 75 and then 85. when they will start to notice how strangely young those 65-year-olds are.

Meanwhile, don't you think I look a lot younger than those 80-year-olds?

Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is wilberth@cableone.net.