

It's wise not to change lines

Dan Hammes/St. Maries Gazette-Record

Age and patience are inversely related.

That is, the older we are the less patience we have. That's my theory at least.

Besides, saying one has less patience sounds so much nicer than saying a person is a grouch. Grouchy old men are, well, just grouches. Nobody likes grouches.

But an impatient old guy is in an entirely different category. People who witness a wrinkle-face with little time to waste suspect the guy has an important place to be.

That or he has a prostate problem.

Either way, impatience garners some sympathy. Grouchy old men engender disdain.

All this occurred the other day as the border guard continued his lecture. The kid, complete with badge and gun, was not old enough to date my daughter but that didn't stop him from rambling on and on about the proper etiquette for motorists at the U.S. border.

While it may be true that I am old and impatient – and/or grouchy – I'm not stupid.

That is why all through the lecture I made certain to nod my head – to demonstrate my agreement with his enlightened view of the world - and I kept my eyes wide, wide open – to show my awe of his amazing knowledge. This, of course, is a wise-old-man trick to prevent the kid, who looked to be all of 12-years-old, from deciding to search my car and wasting more of the impatient-old-man's time.

It worked.

Eventually the lecture ended and I was able to return to the United States sans a strip search by a punk kid with a latex glove. What's more, the episode affords the opportunity to dispense of old-man wisdom.

Switching lines at a border crossing makes border guards cross.

It was a classic example of old-man impatience causing problems. At this particular border crossing on this particular day there were three lanes open for motorists to be questioned. You know the drill. Where you been? Where you going? Got any guns? How much whiskey do you have?

Now the trick, which the chick with whom I travel does not understand, is to pick the fastest line. Not that we were in a hurry, it's more of a male-ego-contest-thing. That is, if the line you pick is

faster than the other lines you get ahead of those other cars, which means – you win. Conversely, if you pick the wrong line and those other cars beat you – you’re a loser. What’s more, the rules of the male-ego-contest-thing dictate that those cars must be passed as soon as possible, which unsettles the chick with whom I travel.

That’s why I chose the line with the Harley. I figured there just wasn’t much to search on a motorcycle and we would soon be whisking down the highway as winners.

Except it didn’t work that way.

For whatever reason, the guard was quite suspicious of the old guy on the motorcycle. Never mind his bike cost more than my first house, this guard appeared convinced that the old guy with a paunch represented a threat to national security. As the delay continued the grouch in me came out.

The fact all this happened the same day we learned the federales could not keep track of a terrorist *after* being told to keep track of said terrorist. We also learned the feds did not seem to notice when the terrorist travelled to a terrorist haven for what – vacation? The fact it did not bother the feds when this very same terrorist launched a website spewing the typical garbage terrorists spew only makes the tale of ineptitude worse. Oh yeah, and the guy being a radical Muslim also adds to the mystery why the feds failed to notice before people died.

One would think, given all that, the federals would pay attention. But instead, they’re giving the third degree to an overweight motorcycle guy.

When it became obvious I chose the wrong line, I opted to change to a fast line. Bad move.

Muslim terrorists may be able to fly about the world but folks in charge of our border really, really, really dislike it if you switch lines. Which is what prompted the somewhat lengthy lecture about why I should never, ever, ever switch lines at a border crossing.

The good news is I did beat motorcycle guy across the border. And I probably would have stayed ahead of him if I hadn’t had to stop in the very next town. Prostrate and all. *DAN HAMMES is publisher of this newspaper.*