

Old Age

December 2016

I am an old man.

Now, say it again, but this time say it slowly and make it sound like you really mean it: I . . . am . . . an . . . old . . . man! That's better! To accept the reality of old age takes practice. Say again: I am an old man.

Last August, I turn 81-years of age. Imagine that! I never intended to live this long and never really gave old age much thought, but here it is, here I am. How did this happen?

A few years back – probably 10, I lose track – I began to notice how much older people looked. Former colleagues whom I had not seen in a while, or park dog-walkers I have observed over the years, or a relative I would meet at the funeral, or even a distant neighbor who happened to walk by the house. They all looked older than I thought they should, or as I had remembered them. Oh for Christ's sake! They probably said the same thing about me: Oh my, how he has aged. I hope he is well.

The death notices in the newspaper confirmed my old age status. Photos of people who have already passed on – some in their 50s, many in their 60s and even more in their early 70s. Where was my photo? Shouldn't I have passed on by now? Where do I fit in?

I was not dreading the news of my old age, and no one specifically told me: you are an old man! Even so, there were clues: the middle-aged female supermarket checkers who called me Hon, and the younger clerks often referred to me as Sir. Can I help you out with that? Are you sure? Can you manage it ok? And during a pause in my daily walk, a young mother came out to ask if I needed any help. I could no longer avoid asking the question: had I become an old man?

Finally, photographic evidence made the case for my old age indisputable. Time and again, I began to show up in family photos as a slightly-hunched shriveling old man. There was simply no other way to describe me, but the slightly-hunched part bothered me the most – stand up straight! my mother used to admonish me, do you want to

grow up and look your Uncle Vic? I became a bit unsettled about family photos yet to come . . . and yes, looking like my Uncle Vic!

My first response to this new reality was: “please excuse my age”, a phrase I developed to use in various email communications with vendors and participants in my online publishing projects;. I suppose this phrase was my way of acknowledging and accepting the obvious, but at the same time holding on to the hope that my old age would explain away any inadequacies or perhaps even elicit a sympathetic response. Sympathy was in short supply but by casually using this “Please excuse my age” I became more self-assured and confident - my judgment was correct: I am an old man. No one disputed me.

I AM an old man.