

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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Cranky Old Men

It's kind of a stereotype typified by Walter Matthau and Jack Lemon in the movie, Grumpy Old Men. It seems that many guys get ornery when they get up into their mid-60s and beyond. Of course, maybe most woman do, too, but I wouldn't know because I'm trapped in a virtually all-male environment.

I've been wondering lately if the old guys really do get cranky or whether it's all a matter of perception. I may not notice younger guys who are just as cranky or simply perceive them differently because they are younger. Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of young, cranky guys but you can tell it's part of their basic personality. Whereas, with old guys, it seems to manifest itself based on age. I've watched the same guys getting older in Stanley over the last 8 years and they all seem to hit the cranky stage in their mid to late 60s.

It occurred to me that maybe those guys aren't really getting cranky so much as having dealt with other people's foolishness for so long they just ran out of patience, not wanting to endure one more instance of idiocy. They may not realize that they are cranky. They are just expressing themselves.

It makes me curious, am I a cranky old guy, too, and just can't see it? Perhaps I am just as snappish and inflexible as the other old guys (I'm 65) but can't see it in myself. Hmm . . ., could be. Or maybe what I'm seeing is a product of years or decades in this austere, twisted prison environment. Perhaps old guys get cranky only when subjected to endless misery. They reach their breaking point and can't absorb any more so they give back to the environment what it has been dumping on them for years.

All I know for sure is that the old guys in prison with me are cranky most of the time, seem to have lost their sense of humor and spend more time complaining than anything else. I try to be polite but I also avoid them as much as possible (maybe they're thinking the same thing about me which is why it's so easy for me to stay away - they're avoiding me too!).