

## Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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### “Middle Age”

Ever notice that “middle age” is a moving target? When I was in college, it was about thirty years old. Now that I’m 43, I haven’t yet reached it. Though I don’t consider myself old, my body tries to convince me that I am. The aches and pains come more frequently in places I didn’t know I had. I scored a personal record last week when I visited the bathroom four times in one night. And the bald spot on my head is growing no matter how much Rogaine, Propecia or Miracle Grow I put on it.

But nothing on my journey to middle age has caused me more frustration than the widespread corruption in the printing industry. Two weeks after turning 40, I accidentally discovered that senior executives in charge of printed materials in our country had unilaterally decided to save paper and money by using smaller fonts and lighter ink.

I first stumbled on this change while dining at a fine local restaurant (I’ve withheld the name of the establishment because of their naïve role in this conspiracy). Our table was dimly lit for ambiance and the waiter was quite professional. He promptly brought our drinks and menus. In hungry anticipation, I opened the three-foot long menu and immediately summoned the waiter.

“The printing on this menu is blurred.” I said. “May I have another one?”

“Certainly,” he replied.

When he brought the second menu, I almost walked out. I couldn’t believe he thought he could bring the same menu back and I wouldn’t notice. I leaned over to my wife and said, “How rude is this?”

She looked at my menu and said, “What’s the problem?”

“The printing is blurred,” I said.

“It looks fine to me,” she said with a “please don’t embarrass me” tone.

I grabbed the menu and looked again. This time, I noticed that it was printed in some sort of 3-D font that got clearer as I moved it away from my eyes. As I experimented bringing it back and forth, my wife suggested that the problem might be my eyes.

*Preposterous.*

I've had trouble seeing things at a distance, but never close up. She reminded me that at our age, not middle age mind you, this happens. Of course, she's an engineer, *not* an optometrist so I suggested that her diagnosis was nothing more than an optical illusion. So there!

For several months, my up-close vision got worse. One day, I found myself at the reading glasses carousel in the pharmacy of the local Giant. Coincidentally, there were 20 people in line to pick up prescriptions that day, and to pass the time, they were all looking at me.

I hoped they were thinking that I was way too young for reading glasses and that I must be picking up a pair for my parents or even my grandparents. Unfortunately, I'm sure they were thinking, "Ah, another victim of middle age."

After trying on about ten pairs of these librarian glasses, I finally settled on a small pair that was not quite half size but wasn't full size either. I looked in the mirror and saw Ben Franklin staring back at me. How did this happen? When did age sneak up on me and stab me in the eyes? Reluctantly, I purchased the glasses but decided against the attractive silver plated neck chain as an accessory.

I don't usually take my glasses with me when I travel because I'm still in denial (by the way, I misspelled denial in the first draft of this article but didn't see it). I flew to Palm Springs a few weeks ago and arrived after dark. I got lost on the way to the hotel and couldn't read the rental car map to find my way back to the main road. I pulled over and turned on the 1-watt ceiling light. Still no luck. I added the light from my cell phone, my PDA and then reflected the light from a street lamp using a quarter. There was just enough illumination for me to see that I had passed the hotel three blocks earlier.

Someone once said, "There's nothing wrong with getting older, it's when you stop getting older that the trouble starts." I agree, but I still resist getting old. The only saving grace is that when the old age writing is on the wall, I probably won't see it.

Until next time, just humor me.

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