

Was it the coffee stain, the thick glasses or maybe the Kleenex? Recovering my cool after a brush with feeling old

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A SENIOR BEAT COLUMN



When I came back from the mall today, I sat down on a bench outside my apartment building, taking in the sun. After a minute, I took off my mask and tapped out a couple of tortilla chip crumbs. I brushed a couple more from the sides of my mouth. Then I noticed a thin trail of coffee on my T-shirt from this morningâ??s breakfast. At that moment, I felt truly old.

I spun off into visions of myself in my mirror that morning: A gray hair on my chin was ripe for plucking. My glasses were thick and magnifying my eyeballs. Kleenex sprouted from my jacket pocket.

Youâ??d think Iâ??d be used to it now â?? being 77. Mentally, I still feel 35. So, what was this all about? What had gotten me so downhearted, I realized, was an encounter Iâ??d just had with a young salesman at the Apple Store.

Appleâ??s fall alert

A few days earlier, I had been there to buy an Apple Watch, mainly because it has a fall detector and 911 alert. The guy who sold me the watch was borderline gallant, helping me choose an adjustable wristband and the watch face with the dancing jellyfish. They didnâ??t have it on hand, so had to mail it to me.

I was supposed to go back to the store to sync iPhone and watch, so calls would ring through on my watch. But, as it happened, I was able to get that done over the phone with my complimentary Apple support call. But the Apple tech had run out of time before she could tell me how to actually navigate all the things the watch can do. â?? starting with how you wanted to see the time â?? digital, analog or with other features â?? not to mention the fall alert.



Artwork by Robin Evans

So, I went back to the store for help. I have to admit, I already felt like a second-class citizen by virtue of my unfamiliarity with the Apple universe. All I wanted was someone to quickly show me the basics: what the two buttons on the side do; how to get the watch to show me the time instead of alternately flashing my heart rate, the weather and a reminder to breathe; how the fall alert worked.

Passed around

But an Apple gatekeeper with a Bronson cap and clipboard wouldnâ??t let me in at first. He kept insisting I needed to go to Verizon to set up the fall detector â?? even though I kept telling him Iâ??d already done that. (They set up my account and started the monthly billing.)

Bronson cap eventually directed me to a young man further back in the store, who then assigned me to a young man obviously on his way to do something else. The two had a brief but tense conversation, which the second young man obviously lost because he grudgingly huffed his way over to me. He didnâ??t sit down next to me at the service bar, as they often do, and kept looking over his shoulder at other tables of happily chatting customers.

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It felt as if he wanted to download me as soon as possible. But apparently unable to find anyone more junior to upload me to, he turned back to me with a barely concealed sigh. As I ran through my story once again, he interrupted abruptly, telling me to unlock my phone.

Embarrassed, rattled

It didnâ??t help that it took my stiff, elderly fingers four tries to enter my passcode. Already embarrassed, I just handed the phone over and told him what I needed him to do: set the clock face, show me how to navigate the home screen and search for the functions I needed. This he did with the speed of light, tearing through my list

So, I slunk out of there, still with a few questions, settled on the bench and wondered what might have caused the grouchiness Iâ??d encountered.

Was it just a case of impatience with elders who are slow and pokey? Was it the used Kleenex bulging from not one but two pockets? Or perhaps, as my millennial daughter complains, I was too matchy-matchy: black and white striped T-shirt, black and white leggings and black sandals? Or maybe the coffee stain on the T-shirt?

Or could it be the current popular disdain for boomers, who so famously had our own scene 50 years ago â?? when it was easy to get jobs, cheap to travel and parental support was always a backup? Feelings of no longer being culturally relevant hit hard. Not only was I feeling old, I realized I had lost my cool.

A rockinâ?? history

This young man obviously had no idea that I actually once *was* pretty cool.

In my 20s, I hitchhiked around Europe and North Africa with two friends â?? hearing â??Good Vibrationsâ?• for the first time in a Florence youth hostel and drinking endless glasses of mint tea in Marrakech. In London, Virgin Records hired me to work in their booking agency upstairs from their first record store in Notting Hill. At a benefit for an underground newspaper, I saw Pink Floyd â?? before they were world famous for extravaganza concerts â?? performing with just a couple of amps on a six-inch-high stage.

When I came back to the U.S., in 1974, I was offered a job by telegram â?? email didnâ??t exist â??with a rock band called Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen. It was headed by George Frayne, an old college friend from Michigan and the band leader known as Commander Cody. I moved to Marin County to become the bandâ??s tour secretary. When the band imploded a couple of years later, a young Marin band called Pablo Cruise offered me a job as assistant to the manager. I was the one who found the artist to design their logo, which has appeared on a million T-shirts over the past 50 years. The artist happened to be Commander Codyâ??s younger brother.

More recently, one of Codyâ??s former record producers arranged for me to interview Linda Ronstadt for San Francisco Senior Beat.

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Look past the wrinkles and youâ??ll find everyone has an interesting story to tell.

Taking charge

But why am I worrying about all this? I wondered. Perhaps I was taking the whole thing a little too personally. Maybe the kid was overdue for a lunch break, and I was keeping him from a Philly cheesesteak at the food court. Maybe us older folks need to sometimes let perceived slights slide.

But what to do? I still had a few questions about the watch. So, I joined San Francisco Village and requested volunteer tech help. A nice man my own age, a former professional computer engineer, came to my house and answered all my current questions and offered to do phone consultations in the future.

In the meantime, I could look up the answers to some of my questions on YouTube. Who knew? Everybody but me, apparently.

Itâ??s now been a week since this little disturbance in my world. And Iâ??m happy to say I fell back on my own resources. Now, I carry a little stick to remove coffee drips and turn to YouTube with tech questions. And when Iâ??m really stuck, I can book an appointment with the Village tech wizard and avoid the Apple Genius Bar altogether.

And as a Boomer, I know I will always be culturally relevant one way or another â?? thereâ??s just so many of us whoâ??ll be sprouting Kleenex until the end.

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