

[View](#)[Edit](#)[Revisions](#)[Workflow](#)

From our sponsors :

**Next Avenue**  
in Your Inbox  
**SIGN UP NOW!**

## I Am Not a Curmudgeon, I'm a Boomer!

With age comes the ability to really tell it like it is

posted by [John Stark](#), December 14, 2012 [More by this author](#)



John Stark is the Articles Editor of *Next Avenue*. Follow John on Twitter [@jrstark](#).



W.C. Fields, the ultimate curmudgeon, in 1953 in uniform of a bank guard  
New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection/Library of Congress

I was at an outdoor mall the other night with a friend and his college-age nephew. We were on our way to see a movie, walking down a street that's only for pedestrians. Canned yuletide music was playing. "I can't stand it," I complained. "I don't want to hear music when I'm outside. Bad enough I have to hear Christmas songs inside every store and supermarket and when I'm on hold on the phone."

"You're such a curmudgeon," the nephew said to me.

Bah, humbug! Don't drop the 'C' word on me, young man — I'm not a curmudgeon. Webster's dictionary defines that guy as "a

crusty, ill-tempered old man ... an irritable and complaining person." It goes on to offer an example: "Only a curmudgeon would object to the nursing home's holiday decorations."

**(More: Boomers Redefine Sex as Foreplay)**

If anything, I'm a romantic, more so now than when I was younger. Nowadays I find myself welling up while listening to piano concertos or looking at photographs in a museum. Art has deeper meaning for me. When I say I don't like something, I'm not expressing my general outlook on life. I'm just being honest. I find this to be true of my friends over 50. Ours, after all, is the generation that coined the term, "Tell it like it is." But we couldn't actually do it back then, not like we can now. It takes age and experience to separate the chaff from the BS. It takes a boomer.

Sorry, Webster's, but no one should be called a curmudgeon for saying they don't like a nursing home's holiday décor, especially if it's tacky. I would have no problem saying so. And if I approved, I would compliment the decorating committee. A curmudgeon can't have it both ways.

Over the last few years every story I saw about the late Maurice Sendak, author and illustrator of *Where the Wild Things Are*, referred to him as a curmudgeon. One newspaper last May headlined his obit "Remembering a Curmudgeon." The other day a friend emailed me one of the last interviews Sendak gave, at age 83, for the online version of *Ms. Magazine*. It was conducted at his country home in Connecticut. "You'll love this," my friend wrote.

I found it delicious. Sendak was in fine form — sharp-tongued, outspoken and critical of his critics. In defense of the violent themes and imagery that appear in his "children's books," he said, "I refuse to cater to the bull---- of innocence."

Yet as contrary as he was in this article, he was equally effusive in his praise of the things he deemed worthwhile, like Mozart, nature, President Barack Obama and literature: "A book is like a lover," he said, "it arranges itself in your life in a way that is beautiful."

No curmudgeon could ever come up with that gorgeous metaphor. It was clear from the interview that Sendak had a big heart, grouch that he could be. He was hardly the personification of a crusty curmudgeon, like Ebenezer Scrooge or *The Simpsons'* Mr. Burns.

Curmudgeons find joy in nothing, unless, like W.C. Fields, it's booze, cigars and frightening young children. Growing older means finding joy in what's real, not what's phony or manipulative. It takes age to truly recognize the difference. If I balk at being subjected to "chestnuts roasting on an open fire," it's only because I've heard it so many times that the song has lost its allure or meaning for me.

Because the future isn't as limitless as it once was for boomers, we don't have time to dance around our opinions. We're more apt to cut to the chase. I recently sent a colleague who's my age an unpublished article I wrote. "Too male-centric" is all she emailed back. She didn't have to soften her critique with, "I really like this, but. . ." In three words, she nailed it. I rewrote it, happily.

As I was leaving the movie theater with my friend and his nephew — we saw *The Life of Pi* — the young man said to me: "We're onto you. You're not a curmudgeon after all!"

He said he could hear me sniffing during some of the film's more emotional scenes. "I was very moved," I told him. "Genuinely."

We exited the lobby and stepped into the street, where I hiked up my coat collar and pulled my knitted wool cap down over my ears. It wasn't the December wind I was bracing against. It was the annoying strains of "The Little Drummer Boy" that filled the air: "*Pa rum pump pum pum, me and my drum.*"

I may have looked like a curmudgeon, but I'm not.