

Don't let the old man in.

*When he rides up on his horse
And you feel that cold bitter wind
Look out your window and smile
Don't let the old man in*

-Toby Keith

I met the old man for the first time in 1995.

I was only 38 years old and still playing softball on Friday nights. The first batter hit a short pop fly right to me, the type of pop up that I never missed. I dropped it. My play got worse. I was thrown out at first on what should have been a clean single to right field. My arm was dead. I had no range. The kid that never wanted to come out of a game gladly took a seat on the bench.

The old man was in the car with me that night. I remember a bitterly cold wind.

The old man came to see me again that Thanksgiving. I had played in an annual football game for years. I was always the QB, had the strongest arm. That year my throws fell short of the mark. I had zero mobility and I was beaten on the field in every way possible. Tackled so hard I'm sure I was concussed. A younger QB subbed in. As I started my car to go home, I lost consciousness for a few minutes, and when I awoke, I had driven the car forward a few feet into a ditch. I shook my head, gathered my senses, and headed home. The old man drove.

I became better acquainted with the old man as the years went by. When my father-in-law's cancer forced me to carry him up the stairs into his house, the old man stared at me in the mirror. The old man came by when my appendix burst, when I dropped my oldest daughter off at college, when my first grandchild was born, when my rotator cuff tore, when I was diagnosed with epilepsy, when I had eye surgery.

I roomed with the old man for a time. He moved in after my first marriage ended, right before the company that I had worked for and helped build sold out to a rival. Thankfully, a smart attorney came along and helped me evict the old man. She's a much better roommate.

But the old man is a persistent.

He returned when my son-in-law died. He showed up at my retirement party. He's there on cold mornings, sleepless nights, long car trips, doctor visits. He winked at me when Jimmy Buffet died. Didn't want to leave after I was afflicted with Covid.

The old man is undefeated but not invincible. Dick Van Dyke, Mick Jagger, Mel Brooks, Willie Nelson and others, including my Dad, have all held him off. It appears Bruce Springsteen is planning to kick his ass. Norman Lear almost leveled him, and Jimmy Carter has fought him to a draw.

Learning from these folks, I have learned a few tricks that keep him at bay. Great music, played loud, scares him. So do good books. The old man doesn't want you to play pickle ball, or golf, travel or go for a walk; so you must. The old man disappears when you laugh or have long phone conversations with old friends. Hugs from grandkids, baseball on TV, a good meal are his enemies. Whiskey is tricky. One bourbon makes him retreat; but have three and the old man sits down with you, holds your hand and reminisces.

Unlike back in '95, I know my adversary now, and I don't plan to give him a foothold. I'm not going to take a seat on the bench, not going to sub out. I'm not going to let him in the car with me, much less drive. He sure as hell isn't moving in.

I've got too much to do.

I'm not going to let the old man in, no matter how much we are starting to look alike.

That's all I'm sayin'

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