

# Too Soon Old

For years, a poem with remarkable emotional impact, entitled *Crabby Old Man*, has circulated on the Internet. The background material accompanying the poem said it was discovered by nurses “in the meager possessions of an old man who died in the geriatric ward of a nursing home in North Platte, Neb.”

That assertion, like much that is disseminated through this medium, is not true, according to TruthOrFiction, an online service enabling folks to “get the truth about rumors, inspirational stories, virus warnings, hoaxes, scams, humorous tales, pleas for help, urban legends, prayer requests, calls to action and other forwarded emails.”

According to TruthOrFiction, the poem actually was written by Dave Griffith of Fort Worth, Texas, more than 20 years ago, and its title is *Too Soon Old*. The poem does appear on Griffith’s website as one of the poems and stories he has written. Griffith told TruthOrFiction that he meant for the poem to be “simple and to the point, from youth through old age in his own personal life, high school football, Marines, marriage and the ravages of his own disabilities.” Someone took the poem from his site, created a false story about it, and started it circulating on the Internet.



Griffith is the author of more than 500 poems. Despite how the poem has been misappropriately used and credited, its message is compelling and thought-provoking. Here it is (with thanks to Dave Griffith):

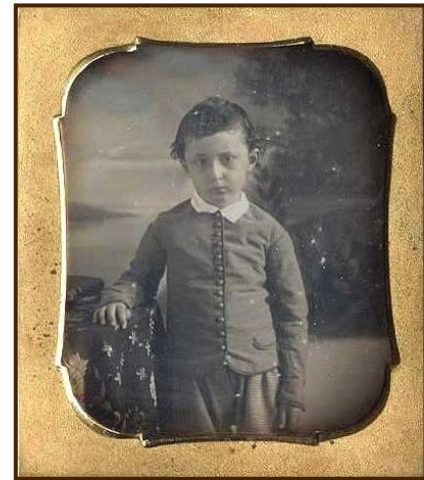
*What do you see, my friends, what do you see;  
What are you thinking when you’re looking at me?  
A crabby old man, one not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit, with faraway eyes,  
Who dribbles his food and makes no reply  
When you say in a loud voice, “I wish you’d try?”  
Who seems not to notice the things that you do,  
And forever is losing a sock or shoe;  
Who, resisting or not, lets you do as you will  
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill.*



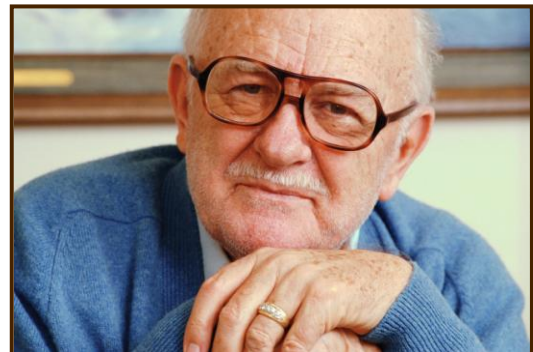
(more)

*Is that what you're thinking? Is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes, my friends, you're not looking at me.  
I'll tell you who I am as I sit here so still,  
As I live at your bidding, as I enjoy company at your will.  
I'm a small child of 10 with a father and mother,  
Brothers and sisters, who love one another.  
A young boy of 16, a football in his hands and with wings on his feet,  
Dreaming that soon now a lover he'll meet.  
A Marine soon at 18 – my heart gives a leap,  
Remembering the oath that I promised to keep.*

*At 25 now, I have a platoon of my own,  
Who need me to guide them and secure a trip home.  
A man of 30, my youth now going too fast,  
Hopefully bound to others with ties that should last.  
At 50, my daughter and sons have grown and are gone,  
And I have no one beside me to see I don't mourn.  
At 60, no more babies play 'round my knee,  
Again I know my heartbreak, my loneliness and me.  
Dark days are upon me, my dreams are all dead;  
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.*



*For my young are all rearing young of their own,  
And I think of the years and the love that I've known.  
I'm now an old man, and nature is cruel;  
'Tis jest to make old age look like a fool.  
The body, it crumbles, grace and vigor depart,  
There is now a stone where I once had a heart.  
But inside this old carcass, a young man still dwells,  
And now and again, my battered heart swells.  
I remember the joys, I remember the pain,  
And I'm loving and living life over again.*



*I think of the years; all too few; gone too fast,  
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.  
So open your eyes, my friends, open and see,  
Not a crabby old man; look closer – see ME!*

The poem is certainly instructive for us who work in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home – to see the residents we serve not only as they are, but as they once were, to understand that there is a little boy or a little girl in each of us.

– Beecher Hunter