

Speed Bumps on The Highway Of Life

To you, it must look like I aged six years today.

The photo accompanying this column – until today - hasn't changed since April of 2002. As you can see, a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then, and a certain amount of hair was carried along with it.

Jeff Charis-Carlson, my neighbor and the Press-Citizen Page editor, pointed out to me over a year ago that I didn't look very much like my photo anymore. I thought he was being overly critical – it was good enough for the three editors before him. But he was right.

You'll notice that every now and then with syndicated columnists. The photos accompanying their columns rarely change, and when they do it's like, "Whoa! What happened to him?"

Last week I watched a TV feature about Jessica Lange, of whom I still have a salacious mental image from her roles in the movies King Kong, Tootsie and The Postman Always Rings Twice, all from at least 25 years ago. It turns out she's 58 years old now – when did that happen? Even more vexing, Julie Andrews no longer looks like she did in 1965's Sound of Music anymore, either.

We don't just wake up one day looking old. I look the same today as I did last week, or last month. But as we travel time's highway – usually on cruise control – every now and then we're jolted back to consciousness when we hit the occasional armadillo of age-awareness.

By that I mean those little things that happen to you every now and then that make you realize that time really is marching on. We all strike armadillos of various sizes at different times of our lives.

Birthdays that end with a zero are figurative armadillos that we all encounter with predictable frequency. The good thing about them is that

they are so large that you can see them a long way off, so you have time to reinforce the grill of your metaphoric car.

Some of us can run them over without a backward glance, others will deny having hit anything (despite all evidence to the contrary), and some will claim it was the same one they hit 10 miles back.

Unfortunately, armadillos seem to bulk up as time goes by. Early in life we tend to collide with lightweight, nerdy armadillos, probably wearing glasses and sporting tiny pocket protectors. Around middle age they turn into steroidal Schwarzenegger-like creatures that cave in your radiator and leave you limping away, trailing coolant.

If you dislike metaphors utilizing nocturnal mammals (and who doesn't?), here's one with an amphibian. Frogs are rumored to be unable to discern small increments in temperature, something like the way humans often fail to note the passage of time.

That's why some people say that when you put a frog in a pan of tepid water that's being slowly heated to the boiling point (kids, don't try this at home), it will sit there thinking everything's fine until it suddenly becomes a pink and green splotch on the kitchen ceiling.

Actually, this whole frog thing is something of an urban myth. What really happens is that as the water gets progressively hotter, the poor critter becomes agitated and will eventually do its best to hop out. We will ignore this inconvenient fact, because it fails to illustrate my premise. Never mind; back to armadillos.

I'll turn double-nickel this year, and - now that I'm entering my twilight years - armadillos of Godzilla-like proportions are looming on the horizon. To cope with this ominous apparition, I have determined that the best strategy is to envision myself as a huge armored vehicle, deliberately careening off life's highway of cautious and fearful life travelers.

I mercilessly pursue vast colonies of scheming armadillos that scatter frantically before me, only to be crushed underneath my madly churning

wheels, their tiny ears ringing with the sound of my sadistic laughter,
HAHAHAHA...

Whoa! I got a little carried away there. But you get the idea – crude
mental deception is better than no strategy at all. Now if I could just
develop a strategy to restore my hairline...