

Can Heroes Grow Old?

3 min read

Feb 7, 2020

by Lauren Flick

To my disbelief, it landed in my Twitter feed: ‘What kind of hero is an 80 year old man, who can’t run up a few flights of stairs and cowers when the fighting breaks out?’ This “Star Trek” fan, or online troll, was referring to Jean Luc Picard, the main character in the series premiere of “Picard” streaming on CBS All Access. As a fan of the franchise “The Next Generation,” I had been waiting with breathless anticipation for the return of my favorite Federation officer, the moral compass of the series and my personal husband-in-my-head, the dashing Captain Picard. Now, after almost two decades, this fan favorite has been revived and Patrick Stewart returns to the iconic role he left so many years ago. Stewart is now 79 years old and in the show — he looks it. He is a handsome, fit man approaching his 8th decade and playing the role which will forever be associated with his name. He is graceful and subtle in a way that only an actor of the highest caliber can bring to this part. As CBS brings back this seminal figure and as more “Trekkies” and “Trolls” question this hero’s status, I ask what has changed aside from time? Patrick Stewart had the audacity to age and America needs to get over it.

Yes, in the premiere episode, we see that our protagonist, now Admiral Picard, does not run without losing his breath and does not take stairs at high speeds. Additionally, he refrains from hand-to-hand combat while being defended by a superhuman young woman. Picard is not twenty, or forty or sixty; he’s almost 80 years of age and he better get winded running from three alien assailants or I’m not buying it! Unfortunately, the images Americans are constantly fed through film, television and digital mediums is one of youth and physical strength. [If *Spiderman* were to get re-booted any younger, he would be a fetus — ‘Spider-fetus!'] Half of the population in America is over 40 and yet the representation on screen is virtually non-existent. What this new “Star Trek” incarnation brings into our homes is not just a hero of the heart but a real flesh and blood human who happens to be older.

The key to Picard’s character from “Star Trek: TNG”, was never an external strength but an internal one. He was the aspirational ideal of a man: thoughtful, kind, empathetic, and moral. Picard had no

superpowers. He couldn't bend steel with his bare hands but he could defend the rights of those who were most vulnerable. Whether it was a new sentient being or refugee Romulans, Picard's character was revered for the courage of his convictions and the respect he had for all life. What if we embraced the idea that a hero is not determined by how fast they run or how much pain they could inflict, but rather how kind they were and how compassionate they were when engaging with others? Jean-Luc Picard's strength was always internal and Patrick Stewart, at any age, personifies those values we should all aspire to as individuals and as a society. Not only do I love "Star Trek", I love that an 80 year old is the hero of our story! NOW let's see an 80 year old woman...person of color...let's break all the cultural barriers and create content that reflects us all!

Lauren Flick is a freelance writer/director in New York City who has worked in television and digital media for twenty years. She serves as the NYC Events Chair of "Women in Media," a non-profit organization that encourages gender balance in the entertainment industry. Currently, Lauren is writing a pilot script for a limited series entitled "Tales of Gen X" which sheds light on the struggles of this overlooked, middle-aged generation. She welcomes producers who strive to feature diverse casts both in front of and behind the camera.

