

BROCK'S BANTER: Return of the "Me" Generation?

By Brock Weir

I often wonder if there is a certain age where one just automatically starts thinking themselves as being 'over the hill'.

Does that happen when you discover your first grey hair? (Check.)

Or when you're rapidly approaching 30? (Maybe, although I can already hear many loyal readers scoffing at this and I'm writing this on Sunday evening.)

I was pondering this earlier today at a family get-together while listening to my brother and cousin, born four or five months apart, muse about being 38. 'Big deal,' I thought. 'I might be a decade behind them, so how different could it possibly be?'

As I considered venturing this brilliant (ahem!) piece of philosophy to them, better sense kicked in and I decided it would be best for all concerned to keep my big mouth shut. No good could come from it and besides, did I really want to know the answer? Probably not.

So, as I bit my lip, I threw my mind back to when our respective parents were on the cusp of 40 and was surprised to find how distant these memories seem. Back then, we viewed the big four-oh as positively ancient and those that were in this neighbourhood 'the Boomers' were products of their times.

Now, that mindset seems ridiculously laughable.

In the short intervening decade or two, what was once considered 'ancient' is now, quite frankly, seen as being in the bloom of youth. I contrast the attitudes of my parents, and even those on the upper end of my own generation, with the attitudes of my own grandparents.

In their heyday, the three grandparents I was actually able to meet were full of life, vitality, goals, and, to borrow a more modern cliché, had a bottomless bucket list. They had grand plans for their respective retirements, places they wanted to go, people they wanted to meet, and life they wanted to live.

The odd thing was, however, that once these people 'born in 1916, 1920, and 1925, respectively' hit a seemingly arbitrary point in their life path, they decided it was time to respect that number and slow life down accordingly.

Before that point I assumed the joke, 'if you don't use it, you lose it', was just something to garner a few chuckles around the card table, but it seemed to prove itself. As my grandparents made a conscious decision to slow down, whether it was giving up a career, social activities, or downsizing their properties, illnesses 'both physical and mental' were then allowed to take root. The drive to slow down accelerated rapidly for all concerned.

If making a concerted effort to slow down to an arbitrary number was an approach to life passed down from their own parents, it doesn't appear to be one that generation passed onto their children. In fact, the exact opposite seems to be the case. Perhaps there is an inherent desire in all of us to fight nature against repeating some of the more irksome things about the generation immediately before us, a desire not to repeat the same mistakes of our parents, but whatever you want to chalk it up to, it seems to have done the trick.

The scale where society ultimately decides what is 'old' and what is 'young' is constantly in flux, much to the benefit of the boomers. '60 is the new 40' is not some claptrap to sell a greeting card, a diet fad, or a product to stimulate hair growth. Whether we youngsters like it or not, it is reality.

If you don't believe me, take a look in any one of our national dailies with a fairly healthy obituaries section. Did you think maybe, 10, or 15, years ago that if someone died between the age of 75 and 80 they had lived a good, full life? Chances are, if someone cashes in their chips at '80', you're now likely to think, 'Wow, that's not too old.'

(Yes, before you read on, I am reasonably sure this is not just a self-preservation technique for anyone steadily approaching the crest of the hill themselves!)

DISCONNECTS

Thinking about this perhaps more than I should have, I was brought out of the reverie by a family friend. Where we happened to be, cell phone service was spotty and, we concluded, it was sometimes nice to be disconnected from the world for a little while, avoiding an endless parade of selfies, ill-advised tweets, and videos of ordinary cats doing ordinary things their owners think are extraordinary.

For him, it was a sign of the times; maybe an indication that self-indulgent culture might be the beginning of a downward spiral for

society in general. Being more concerned with the 'self' than real issues that are preoccupying the rest of the world, such as climate change, alarming developments in the Middle East, and the missing Nigerian girls.

It's true ? these are self-indulgent times we live in, but what can it be attributed to? The boomer generation helped shape the grand excesses and the 'me' culture synonymous with the 1980s and early 1990s. Is it a philosophy that was passed down to their children and, in turn, their grandchildren?

Maybe, but maybe not.

More often than not these days it is the children of the boomers who are taking the helm in guiding kids through life outside the home. Our teachers (and by 'our', I mean our generation) are retiring or moving on to other things and it has been left to us to pick up where they leave off.

From where I stood, we were a generation that was largely set adrift within the education system. We wanted to do 'good' for our community, but outside of a few activities that had mainly in-school benefits, very rarely were we given the opportunity to do so. Things often got in the way, whether it was lack of leadership, or seemingly insurmountable labour strife, and it truly set the tone, although in any case there were significant exceptions to the rule.

The current crop of students are off on their summer holidays and it is, in my opinion, a holiday that has been well-earned by both students and teachers.

A staggering amount of work this year has been done by Aurora students to better the world around them, whether they are raising much needed dollars for cancer charities by giving of themselves (quite literally in instances where large-scale haircuts were the orders of the day), taking a message of acceptance, regardless of race or sexual orientation, out into the community, or putting so many volunteer hours into the system they actually lose track of how much they have actually accomplished.

Some people of a certain age might express a degree of concern about where society is going with what they see as self-indulgence, maybe not having a full appreciation of everything that is entailed with how 'the newbies' occupy their time, but I have seen first-hand not just this year, but over the past several, that these students have largely found a balance in their lives between catering to the self and being the difference they want to be in the world.

At the end of the day, I think we'll be in good hands ? but what you decide to attribute that to is entirely up to you.