

Not A Chip Off The Old Block

Tenacity, hard work, and zest for life are words and phrases, which describe both my generation and my parents'. Yet for all these similarities, my generation is different.

First of all, I believe we are more open and direct in most areas of our lives. "Boomers," as we are sometimes referred to, grew up in an era when television, recently honed for public market, wasted no time offering programming portraying 'the perfect home,' 'the perfect family' " 'the perfect life'. We knew the truth. Life, home, and family were often full of chaos and confusion. The pressure cooker style of living our parents seemed to foster (keep the lid on the stew pot of family squabbles - father knows best - don't add rebellion to the mix, etc.). It was a recipe for disaster and seemed to blow up in all our faces during the 1960 s - the Vietnam War era. We decided as a generation that we needed to talk about issues, dare to disagree with the "establishment," be vulnerable.

Secondly, our generation has been privileged to live on the cusp of fantastic advances in the scientific and academic worlds. Education in my parents' generation often didn't include a college education. Sometimes, as in my father's case, just finishing high school was a formidable task. A few of our kind lived on their parents' money while attending universities of choice. Most of us sought grants, loans and scholarships to finance our learning goals. These monies were not available in such abundance, if at all, to the previous generation. If our parents sought a higher education they often earned it, ~. my mother did, by working a 40-hour a week job while attending college. Theirs was the generation that helped fill college coffers with donations so we could tap into these sources.

Thirdly, occupational options afforded us have been almost limitless. We could be whatever we wanted to be when we grew up, thanks in part to our higher education. Expanding Industrialism and national prosperity further encouraged us to find a job we loved. If the first vocation we chose was not a good 'fit,' we felt the freedom to change careers. Our parents, many of whom fought in the last World War, returned to help rebuild the country. Our fathers often took jobs they didn't particularly enjoy. They were just grateful to be employed. Their generation has felt they must stay with one line of work until retirement. The fear of leaving a business and risking a new start has seemed too great. Perhaps lack of education has played a part. Possibly endangering their lives on a battlefield was their ultimate and only affordable gamble.

Finally, we "boomers" appear to be obsessed with the aging process. Finding ways to patch up our wrinkles and fill in our sags has become an all-time absorption. Thousands of us have joined health clubs to tone up, slim down, and work out, in a futile attempt to salvage our youth. For our parents, aging appears to be an accepted fact of life. They were not raised with a plethora of beauty magazines or constant media bombardment reminding them of their fleeting years. They probably don't like the thought of their own mortality any more than we do. They are just not preoccupied with it.

Both generations have learned from each other, though the process has been slow. Our elders are beginning to talk about long-harbored secrets, past joys and pain; we are learning patience. Some of them are expanding their educational horizons; some of us are learning to live more simply. We may never see eye to eye on all issues. We are dissimilar people with divergent life experiences. Differences will continue between generations as long as mankind populates the earth. Instead of focusing on these differences, I would rather respect and celebrate them.