

## Proud to be a Boomer.



After yet another one of my younger friends rolled their eyes at me and called me “Boomer” after something I said, I felt compelled to respond.

Yes, I’m a *Boomer* (born 1946-1964), raised by the *Silent Generation* (born 1928-1945). My upbringing shaped my perspective.

Born in 1957, I spent my childhood (the 1960s and early 70’s) in a 650 square foot, two bedroom, one bathroom house on 6039 Cascade Drive, Berkeley, Missouri with my three brothers, my sister and my parents. Seven people in a house with one bathroom. One car.

My dad worked two (sometimes three) jobs to keep a roof over our head. My mom stayed home. Five kids under the age of 12 before she was 33, my mom worked as hard as my dad, just not for a paycheck. Mom having a job outside the home was impossible.

On summer mornings my mom would shoo us out of the house with the admonition, “Go get the stink blown off.” We’d come back home for a lunch of PBJ’s or baloney sandwiches. When we got thirsty we didn’t dare come into the house for a drink “don’t come in here and track dirt

into my clean house” so we drank water out of a garden hose. At night we played flashlight tag and collected lightning bugs.

No parent organized, attended or even payed attention to our activities. The neighborhood kids would just gather and start up a game of whatever sport was in season. If other kids were not available, my three brothers and I would play games like “run-up” “tackle” or “fuzz ball.”

We played baseball and football in the street. When a car approached, we paused the game when someone yelled at the top of their lungs - CAR!!!!. Basketball not so much, nobody had a hoop. Street hockey and soccer were played in the church parking lot, where on one particular Sunday, my friend Dennis, after missing an open net for a goal, let out a torrent of profanity so loud and vile, that it stunned and silenced the congregation that was attending church on the same lot. Dennis was 10 years old at the time. Another time, during a playground soccer game, I wasn’t hustling enough to suit a parish priest, so he kicked me square in the ass.

There were a lot of fights, and a lot of bullying. Once I made a big kid mad and he beat the hell out of me while my brother Mike held my books and the other kids watched. No adults intervened nor were ever aware that the fight happened. I later became good friends with that kid. Another time, at a street hockey game behind a gas station, I got mad when an opposing player called me a “pussy.” I decked him with a punch to the face, making his nose bleed. Mike watched and congratulated me as I won my first fight.

We rode bikes everywhere. On dirt paths, along interstates, to shopping malls, to school, behind the trucks spraying mosquito repellent. If we got a flat tire we fixed it ourselves. My brother Kevin had another means of transportation. Kevin and his friends would hop freight trains to travel to other nearby neighborhoods.

Dinner consisted of meals like “*Cowboy Supper*” (pork and beans combined with ground meat and ketchup), “*pigs in a blanket*” (hot dogs wrapped in a crescent roll) or “*goulash*” (leftovers combined in a pot and heated up). And you better clean your plate, “There are kids starving in China.” On “penny a pound night” we went to the local *Ground Round* restaurant where we filled up on the free popcorn and peanuts (you threw the shells on the floor) before our hamburgers were served.

You could buy a coke at the dairy store for seven cents, make it a cherry coke for three cents more. The money for the soft drinks came from standing in the middle of the street and hawking the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* for seven cents a copy. Most customers (but not all) would give us a dime and let us keep the change. When the newspaper raised the price to a dime, the tips stopped and the profits went out of the paperboy business. That’s how I learned about gross margin.

Discipline was handed out swiftly, and sometimes it hurt. “Sassing back” to a parent or a teacher, could get you a slap in the face. Hard physical work was expected. In the summer, after my Dad would mow the grass, my brothers and I raked and bagged the clippings and then did the trimming with a pair of scissors. In the winter, we shoveled the snow at our home and the homes of our elderly neighbors. Our bedroom (the four boys shared one room, my

sister slept in my parents room) was expected to be spotless and my mom inspected daily. Clothes better be put away. You used, and then cleaned, the bathroom quickly, others were waiting. You wiped down the tub after a bath. We didn't have showers in those days.

My bothers and I were close, but also extremely competitive. We would throw beanballs at each other in baseball and tackle each other with abandon in football. Being the youngest, my brother Bryan had a distinct size disadvantage at the time. But he was given no slack. We threw baseballs at his head too, tackled him as hard as anyone else, and he joined us in our battles as an equal.

When my sister Maryann was born, my brothers and I protected her like lions protect their cubs. One day my brother Mike and I came home from school and saw a neighborhood kid tied to a tree with a bike chain. When we asked our brother Kevin "Why is Jimmy chained to a tree?" Kevin replied that he had chained up Jimmy for throwing a rock at Maryann. Mike and I just nodded and went about our business. I still don't know how Jimmy freed himself.

I'm neither bragging or complaining but we didn't have color TV, the internet, I-phones, air conditioning, computers, and certainly no money. We were not taken on play dates or have designer birthday cakes. We didn't have tutors, child psychologists, counseling or frankly, a whole lot of adult supervision. Times were different. Most parents back then were doing the best they could with the resources at hand in rapidly changing times. Just like today's parents.

For better or worse, like it or not, we are all products of the era in which we were born. Hence we all have different perspectives, and roll our eyes at each other.

Like every generation, *Gen-Xers* (born 1965-1981), *Millennials* (born 1982-1996) and *Gen-Zers* (1997-2011), had their upbringing shaped by events (Vietnam, Watergate, 9-1-1) inventions (television, the internet, I-phones) and evolving value systems unique to their times. Hopefully every generation learns (and is taught) from the previous generations and does better. That's what parents want for their kids and grandkids. And, that what I see. The generations after the *Boomers* are smarter, less prejudiced, more open-minded, and in general, better equipped to take on the world's problems than my generation. Mission accomplished. You're welcome.

*Gen-Xers*, *Millennials* and *Gen-Zers* your task now is to make sure the *Homelanders* (born 1997-2011) and *Gen-Alphas* (born 2012 to the present) continue that upward trend. That's a challenge, the *Silent Generation* and the *Boomers* have set the bar high. I can't wait to watch the *Homelanders* and *Gen-Alphas* roll their eyes at you. That will mean you've done your job.

Either by design or happenstance, and in spite of limited resources, my brothers and sister learned self reliance, sacrifice, the work ethic, respect, courage, manners, the value of money, and so much more in that 650 square foot house on Cascade Drive. I wouldn't trade my childhood with anyone else's; past, present or future. I'm proud to be a *Boomer*.

**That's all I'm sayin'**

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Arthurian Generation, 1433–1460  
Humanist Generation, 1461–1482  
Reformation Generation, 1483–1511  
Reprisal Generation, 1512–1540  
Elizabethan Generation, 1541–1565  
Parliamentary Generation, 1566–1587  
Puritan Generation, 1588–1617  
Cavalier Generation, 1618–1647  
Glorious Generation, 1648–1673  
Enlightenment Generation, 1674–1700  
Awakening Generation, 1701–1723  
Liberty Generation, 1724–1741  
Republican Generation, 1742–1766  
Compromise Generation, 1767–1791  
Transcendental Generation, 1792–1821  
Gilded Generation, 1822–1842  
Progressive Generation, 1843–1859  
Missionary Generation, 1860–1882  
Lost Generation, 1883–1900  
Greatest Generation, 1901–1927  
Silent Generation, 1928–1945  
Baby Boomers, 1946–1964  
Generation X, 1965–1981  
Xennials (Oregon Trail Generation), 1977–1985  
Millennials (Gen Y), 1982–1996  
Homelanders (Gen Z), 1997–2011  
Gen Alpha, 2012–present