



A GLIMMER OF HOPE

By Bill Boyer

A newspaper article caught my interest the other day, concerning the concept that there is perhaps hope for the newest generation coming along. Seems there's a comparison between them and the "Greatest Generation", that grew up in the shadow of the Depression and the Second World War -- which not only proved self-reliant, but frugal (untempted by credit cards), and by dint of sacrifice and ingenuity manifested a period of industrial and personal growth (by present standards) of immeasurable magnitude.

This led, of course, to a society peopled by those termed the "entitled," who expected -- and received -- the largesse implicit during "good times". And now that we are bringing up a generation in the not-so-good times, they may themselves be exempt from expressions of greed and complacency exhibited by their elders.

Generational expert Neil Howe has termed this newest grouping the "Homelanders," since they are experiencing a period of public "urgency and emergency". And Janet Reid, affiliated with Global Novations, states: "It won't be taken for granted that prosperity is guaranteed". She also feels that our newest citizens -- born since the proliferation of the Internet (and already proficient in multitasking) -- have an inborn comfort level with different races, ethnicities and cultures.

This is all well and good -- as long as they are given opportunity to interact with their peers to form a societal sense of inclusion; and (as mentioned in the previous article) restrain from adapting the lifestyles of non-exercising, over-medicating, self-absorbed adults.

It's sad there no longer are any "heroes" for these youth to emulate, since the medias' (and Facebook's) focus on private lives reveal skeletons in every closet.

And it's sadder yet that the Cookie Monster no longer is featured on "Sesame Street" (presumably as a politically

correct response to pacify dietary Nazis; and -- get this -- the announcement that the formerly innocuous "Archie" comic books will soon be sporting a "gay" youth, as answer to some dimwit's idea to make the story-lines more "inclusive".

Now if current parents will lose some of their preconceived notions of "safety" and over-sanitization, (not to mention hypersensitivity) and permit these upcoming children to be a bit adventuresome, they might have a chance. It was interesting to hear over the radio that some scientists are saying that children at present are lacking a bacteria found in dirt, that promotes serotonin necessary in development of the brain. And this coincides with the report that some doctors are even prescribing "dirt pills", as an effort to introduce immunology that many children lack in their systems.

Let's face it, the proliferation of anti-bacterial agents to clean the home environment is but a means of retarding immunization; just as the increase in asthma and other respiratory ills -- as well as allergies -- are attributed to inability of the body to develop antibodies.

Adaptation is the name of the game. Back in the days when we burned our trash, as well as our grass in the spring, we probably developed an affinity to smoke -- which included tolerance for tobacco fumes. We also thought nothing of using a communal drinking cup to dip from a water barrel at ball games, and the only helmets were those worn by football players. We rode in the back of pickups (or when going to scout camp in the mountains, in the back of a farm truck), and the only seatbelts were those used in airplanes and race cars. In fact, my own children learned to walk, back and forth in a van, as we traveled down the road. It is interesting, too, that before Kansas had speed limits (and when I first took the wheel), there were no more highway accidents per capita than are experienced today.

There also was not such a propensity toward violence, that is exhibited today over the country (or is it just our preception, due principally to instantaneous and expanding coverage?). I only know that our town (which isn't so much different now) had only one or two individuals who ever saw the inside of a prison. Now it seems that a goodly smattering are incarcerated (or have been), as we have discovered that though the violent ones might deserve a bit of time in the county jail, non-violent "law-breakers" in our system of over-zealous enforcement are ripe for shipping out to populate ever-expanding prisons. Who would have thought, back then, that justice through our court system -- including judges, attorneys, police, parole and probation officers, processing agencies and ancillary personnel -- could become such a lucrative and self-perpetuating business?

But the main problem facing the upcoming generation will be whether revampment of our educational

system can cope with not only the changes wrought by a cyber-society, but its inclusion in a world without borders, as the Internet expands into every clime.

And though there is so much pressure today to “protect” children, there probably is no way to distance youngsters from the insidious deluge of gossip, hyperbole and expose’s rampantly passing for “news” (not to mention introduction to porn), that invades one’s everyday existence. So perhaps it is a blessing that tomorrow’s crop -- due to abbreviated means of communicating -- will develop even shorter attention spans. Of course, it also occurs that there might be a lack of imagination and sense of adventure inherent -- except those generated by scenes inspired by virtual reality escapism, which soon will be the norm.

But how will that differ from our own “escapism”, expressed through the realm of television and the Internet? How different are we from the Romans who got their jollies from the ‘circuses’? (though they at least were treated to their fetes out-of-doors, in the fresh air). Perhaps a “return to nature” will be in the cards, when the children discover that the Internet is itself stilted, in its addictive grasp and confinement.

I also hope the new generation will be able to penetrate the false wall we have erected through adherence to obfuscation, in insisting that the language be “prettied up”. Perhaps they can forego the need for euphemisms through a desire to abbreviate language, just as they have shortened multiple phrases by initialing, to simplify texting. Because let’s accept the fact that our current phrasing is stultifying enough without going to the extreme where a janitor is now termed a “maintenance engineer”, and a cripple is not even any longer “handicapped”, but “physically challenged”. Just as we are expected to accept there supposedly no longer are any stupid people, only folk who are “intellectually challenged”.

But then again, aren’t we all, to some degree? ■

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