

Gen-X – A Different Brand of Senior Citizen

by Alexandra Lander

When you hear the words Grandma and Grandpa, what images come to mind? Gray hair, dentures, and Frank Sinatra music? Maybe those grasshopper-green polyester pants that old men insist on wearing in public?

I invite you to imagine, for a moment, what life in retirement communities will be like when Gen-Xers (or Gen Y, or maybe even the tail ends of the Boomers) are in their eighties and nineties. Music will be loud, pulsating from people's rooms, and no one will care. Grandparents will be showing their sulky, teen-aged grandchildren a "vintage" CD and saying, "See this? This was called a CD. They were the 'shit' (it will be acceptable for grandparents to cuss in front of their grandchildren by then, and shit won't even be a bad word anymore) when we were young. And this band here...Nirvana...now *that* was music compared to the crap you kids listen to these days!"

And what will we look like? I hate to think of what happens when multiple body piercings and tattoos meet the inevitable sagging skin of old age. I'd be willing to bet that the majority of us will have really great senior citizen bodies. After all, we grew up with personal trainers, diet supplements, overall health awareness...and tons of preservatives in our food. So those who didn't spend their early years in front of the TV or the PlayStation (they will, sadly, be dead of diabetes or heart failure by then) will probably be visiting the nursing home's workout room at least once a week. Two 85-year-old guys will be taking bets on who can bench the most. Thirty pounds? Maybe forty? Whoa, dude, not with this prosthetic leg!

Since we were all born after the sexual revolution, I'm sure nursing home staff will see residents slinking back and forth between rooms at night, with silly grins on their toothless faces. After all, Viagra will have only been the predecessor to whatever ten-times-more-efficient, mega-potency drug exists then. With all the improved plastic surgery and implants, an eighty year-old woman might still be fairly desirable. Goldie Hawn, Jane Seymour and Jacqueline Bisset are all approximately twenty years away from that age. See the logic? As far as the men, well, they're still benching and pumping iron in the gym, remember? Besides, everyone knows men become more handsome and distinguished with old age...except for sagging man-boobs. Nobody likes those.

Getting back to the music, we all know that nursing homes throw their residents a perk every now and then. Sometimes it's a visiting boy scout or brownie troop, sent to bring youthful cheer. Sometimes it's a showing of an old, favorite movie from the day ("Oh look, it's *Terminator!* Remember that one, Jen? That was way before Senator Schwarzenegger got into politics! Do you think the guy will ever retire? He's 110 for God's sake!"). But on music night, it will be a "vintage agro-rock" band (kind of like how the swing bands play at fundraisers and community parks nowadays). Nursing home staff will loathe music night, because this will be the night that the carefully-hidden bottles of hooch will add a touch of belligerence to the normally pacified residents. This

will be the night when they decide to start an impromptu mosh pit, for old time's sake, and several calls to 9-1-1 will be made when collar bones snap and hips fracture. The best part of music night will be when all the residents sleep till noon the next day, worn out, hung over and quiet again.

Because we grew up in a fast food universe, a food court will be a regular option for every rest home. It will feature a few state-of-the-art names, as well as McDonalds, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut—which will still be going strong. The only change will be that every menu item will have a pureed option.

Have you thought about the kind of senior citizen you, personally, will become? In the town where I used to live, there's a city park that's home to a popular music venue. It is also the hangout for two archetypal senior citizens. The first is the Dog Lady. This is the term I gave to her, after the first time I encountered her wrathful eccentricity. A female equivalent of Keith Richards, she looks like she's survived on a diet of cigarettes and scotch every day of her life. She rides around the park on a motorized three-wheeler, and mounted to its back is a haphazard wire cage containing her two neurotic dogs. They pace frantically and their barks (for some odd reason) are so quiet that they sound muffled. Don't bother smiling or saying hi to her—she just rides by without making eye contact, her mouth twisted into a permanent snarl. The Dog Lady has not had a good life. She does not like people. She will probably die alone, and her caged dogs will starve (unless someone finds them and sets them free). I commend her independence and the resourcefulness of being able to “walk” her dogs as she grows feeble, but . . . let's face it, she's a freak. Not that all freaks are bad. Some of them just have more fun, like the Dancing Grandma.

The Dancing Grandma is the nickname citizens of said town have given the old woman who goes to the above-mentioned concert venue and dances her heart out on the sidelines. It doesn't matter if it's hard rock, jazz, swing, country, or some god-awful has-been group (which the venue gets too many of, in my humble opinion). You will notice her immediately, from her pyramid-shaped white hair and her signature move--the flailing hula-arms. Sometimes young people get up and dance with her. Many people make fun of her. The newspaper even wrote an article about her once, claiming what a visual nuisance she is at shows. She doesn't give a damn. She never asked for the notoriety (although I secretly suspect she likes it), she just wants to dance! She refuses to let age dictate the level of fun living she's allowed to have.

I think it's safe to say that when we are old, we hope we will have left some cool legacy before we start losing our marbles. Our child, who grows up to find the cure for cancer, a best-selling novel, a foundation in our name...but when we do become eccentric, it would probably go better for us if we're more like the Dancing Grandma and not the Dog Lady. The Dancing Grandma will have the most visitors in the Gen-X nursing home, and if she doesn't, she won't really care anyway.