

# Perspective

A newsletter for widening your point of view

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Richard Bach, in his book *Illusions*, states a handy aphorism: **Perspective – use it or lose it**. This periodical – distributed by Rob Greenaway & Associates – shares amongst recreation and tourism management professionals, and others, several tools and concepts which will help exercise your perspective.

This edition explains why I've been a bit slack in issuing newsletters, and reviews a necessary book by Bobby Duffy which analyses how generations really differ, and why claiming differences that don't exist is misleading and dangerous.

## The New Yorker

There's a scene in the excellent American comedy and 53-episode ethics lecture *The Good Place*<sup>1</sup> where a character is assigned their personal hell. It's a small, unfurnished room in which Michael will spend eternity, containing for entertainment nothing more than a giant stack of *New Yorker* magazines. He complains, "Oh come on. You and I both know I'll never read those." The demon replies, "Of course you won't. But ... they'll ... just ... keep ... coming. Ahahahaha."

For the past three years I have been receiving a gifted subscription to *The New Yorker*, which is one of the reasons I haven't written a newsletter in that time. It's a brilliant magazine with incredible writing and fantastically researched articles, and they must all be read. Sadly, it's also like scrolling through a social media feed – very slowly. On completion, I'd only have a vague idea of what each fascinating article was about, being immediately diverted by the next. As Arthur Krystal wrote about how much of our lives we remember,<sup>2</sup> I recall only a "bird's breath" of 150 or so magazines.

I took to ticking their covers once completed to make sure I didn't read them twice, and handed them on as quickly as possible. I photographed interesting sections with my phone – and now discover I have multiple images of the same pieces taken at different times.

The subscription has ended. The veil has lifted. Although my daughter tells me that you can get *The New Yorker* for free via the Libby library app... Ahahahaha. ❖



## Generations

My Zodiac sign is Asparagus. It's all such tosh. I have been tempted to think the same of terms like 'Generation Z' and 'Millennials'. I'm a 1965 child of two people born in 1921 and 1936, so I'm not sure if I should be a Baby Boomer (born 1945 – 1965), with an older war-era dad from Matapihi, or Generation X (1966 – 79), and a younger bluestocking (as my dad's mother called her) mum from Remuera.

Happily, Bobby Duffy, in his excellent book *Generations* (recommended in a *New Yorker* article), supports my suspicions.<sup>3</sup> While generational differences are not all tosh – there are clearly various broad personal characteristics influenced by when you were born – the generational titles are misleading and harmful.

Duffy is suited to this analysis. He's Director of The Policy Institute at King's College London and Professor of Public Policy, and was the

Global Director for the Ipsos Social Research Centre. He strikes me as the sort of person who would buy one of Ben Goldacre's mugs adorned with the slogan, "I think you'll find it's a bit more complicated than that."<sup>4</sup>

Duffy posits that, "Our primary way of understanding generations is through superficial and poor-quality punditry that identifies a multitude of generational differences that don't exist... Assertions that all Millennials [1980-1995] are either narcissistic, materialistic or civic-minded (depending on who you listen to) don't help anyone. This multi-million dollar 'generation industry' encourages researchers to reduce vast swathes of the population to a handful of characteristics and behaviours."

He bases his assessment of generational differences and similarities on three explanations for how attitudes, beliefs and behaviours change over time. These are:

- Lifecycle effects, where differences depend largely on how old you are. For example, Duffy cites a common misconception that Millennials are relatively disloyal employees, job-hopping at any opportunity. In the US at least, while younger employees do stay in jobs for shorter periods than older employees, that has been the case since at least 1983, when the young employees were Baby Boomers. In fact, in the US and UK, older employees are now tending to change jobs more frequently. (Ironically, Duffy points out that in the UK in 2016 the average pay rise for people who stayed in their job was 1.7 per cent, but 7.8 per cent for those who changed.) Similarly, using an example from Germany, all generations work pretty much the same hours per week (Millennials aren't slackers).
- Cohort effects. These depend on how you and your peers were socialised, and can best be described as generational differences which tend to persist over a lifetime, such as reductions in church attendance, and declining alcohol consumption.
- Period effects, which are events affecting all generations at the same time, such as the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC).

Duffy seeks to deflate prejudices that are regularly spouted in the media. Such as: Millennials and Gen Zers (born after 1996 or so) have short attention spans (there are no data to support this); Gen Zers work harder than Millennials (again, no available data); Millennials need constant praise (Duffy – a Gen X – points out that he also likes praise, and I suspect that we are all just a little kinder these days and are more willing to dole it out); Millennials are team-players while Gen Z like to work independently (...typed the Boomer from his home office).

<sup>1</sup> Note to Jack Johnson when he asks, 'Where'd all the good people go? I've been changing channels. I don't see them on the TV shows.' They're on *The Good Place*!

<sup>2</sup> Krystal, A. 2022, Jan 24. What's the Deal, Hummingbird? *The New Yorker*

<sup>3</sup> Duffy, B. 2021. *Generations. Does when you're born shape who you are?* Atlantic Books

<sup>4</sup> Goldacre, B. 2009. *Bad Science*. Fourth Estate

I saw an odd one in the *Otago Daily Times* the other day: “To many a millennial, seaweed used to be just a key ingredient in sushi.”<sup>4</sup> Really? These are just lazy tropes.

So, what lifestyle patterns can we attribute to cohort effects, where named generations can be differentiated over time by behaviour or opinion? There are the declines in church attendance – 70 per cent of Gen Zers in England have ‘no religion’ compared with just under 30 per cent for those born before WWII – and alcohol consumption, from 20 per cent of Baby Boomers in England drinking five or more days of the week, to 5 per cent of Millennials, and 1 per cent for Gen Z.

Suicide is a sad one. Duffy cites claims where Gen Z is dubbed the ‘Suicide Generation’, which he suspects arises from the intense grief associated with youth suicide, and because after cancer it *is* the second most common cause of death amongst teenagers in many countries (he cites the UK, Canada, Australia and the US). However, Duffy’s data indicate a decline in youth suicide since the 1990s. Those most likely to take their own life are those in Gen X. In the UK, prior to the early 1980s, suicide was spread evenly across the ages, but rose when Gen Xers reached their 20s, and has been maintained by that cohort as they age (now between 43 and 56). Various reasons are proposed, largely based on education and poverty. The US has a different picture resulting from its opioid epidemic.

Housing is another cohort issue. The US and Britain have similar trends. In the latter, just 11 per cent of Baby Boomers were renting privately in 1984, when they were around 20 years old. This rate nearly doubled for Gen Xers in 1999 at the same age, and doubled again for Millennials by 2016 at 44 per cent. That’s a lot of smashed avocado – hopefully on the faces of the commentators who reported this silly trope as some sort of character defect. It is clearly an interaction between the cohort effect of being born at a particular time, and the period effect of the GFC and other housing policy problems. In Aotearoa, house prices rose 143 per cent between 2012 and 2022, while the median household income increased by 46 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Renting and staying at home longer is not a miserable character trait of a generation.

‘Delayed adulthood’, as Duffy calls it, is another associated trend resulting from longer periods in education, poor home ownership access, increased debt (education and much higher accommodation costs), wage stagnation and job uncertainty. Again, this is not the result of avocado consumption. Duffy points out that, although younger generations might enter ‘adulthood’ later, they rapidly catch up with older cohorts in terms of many habits, such as becoming more politically conservative as they age (but not as much as those older generations).

If a Gen Zer needs emotional support buying a house in their 30s or 40s, it’s not because they’re part of a snowflake generation – they just haven’t had the opportunity to flex the muscles that Baby Boomers might have exercised in their 20s.

Almost all other generational differences promoted in marketing and the media are merely age-related (apart from social media use).

Most interesting is political polarisation via the regurgitation of mythical intergenerational culture wars. Who’s the most woke? ‘Snowflake’ Gen Zers and Millennials, or Baby Boomers? In Britain, 20 per cent of Baby Boomers reported boycotting a company because they behaved unethically compared to 16 per cent of Millennials, and Gen Xers are more likely than Millennials to pay more for an ethically-sourced product. Same in Germany. The vast majority of Millennials and Gen Zers willingly took some of the biggest hits during COVID lockdowns to protect their elders – hardly snowflake behaviour. But such data butters no parsnips if you need to shore a political base.

Duffy reminds us that ‘moral panics’ over the behaviour of the young are almost always misplaced. Regularly eating potatoes and high levels of online activity have similar correlations with poor mental health, but the former does not make good copy. In 1983, the US Surgeon General warned of the scourge of Space Invaders and an associated rise in family violence.

As Pete Townshend said, the kids are alright. While David Byrne added: “And we’re not little children / And we know what we want / And the future is certain / Give us time to work it out.” ❖

## The things people say

In 2020, I was walking along the Whitianga waterfront on my way to an Environment Court hearing about a local marine farm proposal. Feeling like the only person at a party who hadn’t been advised that it wasn’t fancy dress, I was fully attired in suit and tie. A very kindly older gentlemen on a mobility scooter called me over and asked, “Are you looking for a job?”

More poignantly, I was staying at a motel in Auckland en route to a site visit for a coastal pathway development. I arrived in the evening, and while the front of the building was quite tidy, the rear was littered with kids’ bikes and other toys. As I was being escorted to my room, another kindly chap called quietly over a balcony, “Mate, mate. Don’t worry. You’re safe here.” It took me a while to work out what he meant. Very sadly, it was what many guests would need to hear. ❖

## For Your Interest

The past two years has been busy. You’ll need to zoom in for this, or just pass it by. We’ve been occupied by: Northport’s Vision for Growth port development with Enviser; mining proposal assessments for OceanaGold in Waihi; the Wakamoekau Scheme for Wairarapa Water; Auckland Council’s Te Whau pathway; Graymont’s Oparure limestone quarry extension and consenting with PDP; King Salmon’s Blue Endeavour marine farm consents with Gascoigne Wicks; multiple hydro scheme consents for Manawa Energy in the BOP, Taranaki, Manawatu and Waikato; a consent application for a flyride for Hamner Springs Pools and Spa (nice to work with Prof David Simmons on this); a Whakatāne Boat Harbour development with Phil Wardale and Sally Gepp; multiple marine farm assessments for the Proposed Marlborough Environment Plan (Friends of Onapua Bay, Clifford Bay Marine Farms, Clearwater Mussels; Marine Farming Association, Aquaculture NZ, Talleys); Genesis Energy’s Tekapo hydro scheme consenting; Meridian Energy’s Waitaki Scheme consenting; Wellington Water Porirua wastewater consents with Stantec; marine farm proposals in the Hauraki Gulf and Mercury Bay with Gascoigne Wicks; the Amuri Balmoral Water Storage Facility with Enspire; a development contributions review for Port Nikau in Whangarei; Lake Onslow / NZ Battery Project hydro investigations for MBIE and DOC; various tasks for the Nelson City Council including a reserve management plan for Tahunanui, land access options development with Ngāti Koata, and a hunting policy; a consent for Tasman Asphalt with Sally Gepp; the Bayview Maitahi Proposed Plan Change 28 (Kaka Valley) in Nelson with Landmark Lile; Wakatu Quay developments for Kaikoura DC with Enviser; a concession application for a high ropes course in Hamner; advice to Auckland Council for Private Plan Change 48 appeals; Ravensdown Dunedin plant consenting; the Otago Regional Council Outstanding Water Bodies project with Prof Ken Hughey; Point Erin Park Central Interceptor

consent for Watercare; Port of Tauranga channel consenting; Akaroa Wharf replacement consents for the CCC with Enviser and Planz Consultants; and a marina consent in Lake Wakatipu. And a park ranger history project with Bamford, Heine, Green, *et al.* Amongst other things.

More importantly, on the boating front, I decided our wee yacht, which we’ve had for 12 years – and which I’d just finished refitting – wasn’t up to the more robust sailing it was experiencing, so we found a 1989 Farr 1220 in Auckland in need of some TLC, and sailed it to Nelson in May 2021. I’ve front-footed the refit this time, and spent last winter renewing and replacing, and now *Isla* is pretty much ready for anything. In the meantime, our daughter Katherine and I had a wee trip to Aotearoa’s Subantarctic Islands (not on *Isla*) while son Jack was enjoying *Outward Bound*, and he’s now in his final year of a science Degree in Aquaculture and Marine Conservation, with Katherine just starting her thesis on paleoecology with a case study on Lake Rotokare in Taranaki. Elizabeth and I have been filling in some domestic travel gaps – such as to the Catlins, which was the last chunky part of Aotearoa where I hadn’t previously had a work project. And we’re taking off a couple of months this year to do some long-distance walks. So, best get on with it. My mantra for the year, as always: Deadlines rule!

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, J. 2023, Jan 11. Seaweed could treat eczema. In *Otago Daily Times*

<sup>9</sup> Bentley, A. 2022, July. *Change in Housing Affordability Indicators: Concepts, sources, and methods.* Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga