

The Boomer Generation: A Closer Look at Their Struggles

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This post is inspired by a post on X (Twitter) by Sandy Tregent (@SandyofSuffolk)

<https://twitter.com/SandyofSuffolk/status/1885363470624788767>

The Baby Boomer generation, born between 1946 and 1964, is often depicted as the one that “had it all.” With their prosperity and abundance, they are portrayed as the generation who ushered in an era of progress and comfort. However, this portrayal oversimplifies their experiences and overlooks the hardships they faced in their early years.

As Sandy rightly pointed out, the Boomers didn’t have it all, and their childhood years were marked by significant challenges. Many Boomers were raised in the aftermath of World War II, playing in the rubble of cities like London, Coventry, and Plymouth. These cities, which had been heavily bombed during the war, were only starting to rebuild in the mid-1960s.

This generation was also shaped by the harsh realities of food rationing, which persisted until 1954. For many, the post-war years were not marked by plenty, but by scarcity. Some children grew up malnourished and suffered from rickets, a direct result of the lack of essential nutrients during their formative years. It wasn’t until the end of rationing that food began to become more abundant, but for many families, life remained frugal for much longer.

Housing was another challenge. The working classes lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, often in slum housing with no indoor bathrooms. Bath time was a communal event, with tin tubs dragged into the kitchen and filled with the same lukewarm water that was shared by the entire family. Dads were always the last to bathe, making do with water that had become increasingly dirty. Many of these conditions persisted for years, as new council housing was scarce, and the waiting lists were long.

Education, too, was a privilege that was often out of reach. Many Boomers began working at the age of 15 or 16, with limited access to higher education. The idea

of university was reserved for the privileged few, often those from wealthier families. For the majority, the focus was on securing a job as early as possible, not on pursuing academic aspirations.

In my own response, I reflected on how the effects of these conditions continued into the next generation. My mother, who was 15 when rationing ended, often spoke of how many of life's luxuries remained out of reach for years. For many families, the first to attend university were of my generation, those in Generation X. As part of Generation X, we often pride ourselves on our independent, skeptical, and adaptable mindset—a mindset that was born from the struggles and challenges of the Boomers.

Indeed, the Boomers' experiences were shaped by the class divides of their time. While some were able to enjoy the benefits of social mobility, others continued to struggle, with little access to the privileges that many of us take for granted today. The experiences of each individual were shaped not just by their birth year but by their social class, geography, and family circumstances.

Sandy's post serves as a reminder of how easy it is to assume that an entire generation "had it all." Such assumptions only serve to create division between generations, fueling resentment and misunderstanding. The reality is far more complex, and by recognizing the struggles faced by those who came before us, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that shaped their lives.

The Boomer generation may have experienced prosperity later in life, but their early years were defined by scarcity, hardship, and resilience. They didn't have it all, but they certainly helped build the foundation for the world we live in today.

For that we should eternally grateful.