



We're Back!

Still Beautiful, Bolder, and Hopefully a Whole Lot Better

By Andrew Moore

Some would say we've never been away, but we have, joining the rat race, hibernating, accommodating, making a living, and raising children. This time we have to come back to finish the job we started 50 years ago. The first time around we liberated ourselves, for just a brief moment; now we have the monumental and contradictory job of liberating the world from our selves.

Selfish citizens, we baby boomers once had it all but did not know what we were supposed to do with it. For the first time in history, with the invention of the pill and before AIDS spoiled the party, we had sex and free love without guilt and consequences. We had illuminations of the herbal and chemical kind and super consciousness of the magical mystery trips. Our world, bathed in the glow of the summer of love in 1967, reverberated to the political and social challenges of 1968.

Fed on an intoxicating diet of "sex and drugs and rock and roll" we even had the choice between "sitting in" or "dropping out." By decade's end we felt like champions of the world; freed of generations of limiting social mores, we reinvented ourselves. Music, art, and a new experimental culture took a quantum leap into the future. We did not care for the mundanities of life. Earning money was easy, as work was plentiful; and even better still, if you still lived at home, parents would provide. Going to war—as many a poorer people, missing out on this adventure, had to do—was anathema. Our new mantra was "make love not war."

The revolutionary '60s danced straight into the hedonistic party of the '70s. Under the influence of our addictions to the trappings of our newfound lifestyle, we were losing sight of our ideals and our vows to each other to relate passionately and compassionately to all sentient being who share the planet.

By the '80s these ideals had given way to a new reality of greed

and consumerism. We exchanged freedom for a mortgage and life for life insurance. The writing had been on the wall for some time, or in our case it was "one more brick in the wall" of separation. "Greed is good" was and still is the Wall Street mantra.

The '90s and the beginning of our new millennium have consolidated our position in the world that knows only continued growth at the expense of finite resources. We have no one else to blame; we have always been the voting majority in our society. Later generations, including those of our children and grandchildren, known by such impersonal names as X, Y, and Z, continue to live in our shadow and will now be expected to provide for us in our retirement.

We have come full circle. Those of us who were adolescent (a recent phenomenon at the time—the word teenager had just been coined) in the 1960s and 1970s are now on the verge of reaching a similar unique experience in our 60s and 70s years. Our life's journey resembles

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a palindrome, a word that reads the same forwards as backwards like ABBA. We start with childhood, move into adolescence, take on adulthood but now, before succumbing to the inevitable second childhood (Shakespeare's *sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything*), we have a chance for one last fling—second adolescence.

Just as the teenager concept was first introduced as a recognized stage in life in the late 1950s and early '60s (old photos of our relatives confirm how before then we went straight from childhood into adulthood), we stand at the beginning of what can easily become a new social revolution. There are so many similarities between adolescence and second adolescence (Elderescence?) which dovetail neatly, signifying amazing opportunities for both us and the world. In adolescence we had a relatively carefree lifestyle, before the responsibilities of mortgages and children. In second adolescence we have just paid off our mortgages and our children have

left or are leaving home and we are relatively carefree again.

That first groundbreaking period of our adolescence lasted only 10 years or so for each of us, yet now we have approximately 20 years before we settle into serious old age. What are we going to do with this opportunity while we still have reasonable health, wealth, time, and hopefully greater wisdom?

There are massive challenges awaiting us, including the effects of climate change and rampant economic instability, which are developing into potentially global, life-threatening catastrophes. The causes of these we were well aware of in the 1960s; President Carter even installed solar panels on the roof of the White House in the '70s; but we got sidetracked and dropped the ball.

These issues have now come back to haunt us and if we are not sharp, bury us. We consciously and unconsciously created these monsters and it clearly falls on us to resolve them rather than leave them to the next generation, who will all be struggling to keep us in the manner to which we have become accustomed. Einstein said "The world will not evolve past its current state of crisis by using the same thinking that created the situation. This requires us all to think and to act differently, and that's the challenge."

Are we up to this challenge? Our track record is not good; our current preferred lifestyles still make us all complicit in maintaining the status quo. At a national level this is reflected in the self-interests and missed deadlines that are now the norm at global climate change treaties. Vested political and business interests keep the oil industry thriving and ensure the renewable energy alternatives stay alternative. Fear and greed are still the prime motivators for running the world's economies.

This breakdown on a personal and global level could give Moth-

er Earth a chance to purge herself of her parasitic offspring. Alternatively, it could give us the motivation for a last collective super-human effort to break through our collective insanity to create a liberated physical, social, and spiritual world.

Yes, we're back, but do we have what it takes this time? 🐦

Andrew Moore is an Architect who ensures that communities define architecture, not the other way around. He has worked extensively with all levels of government, the private sector, and many grassroots organizations over the last 30 years. He likes to work on the "front line" where lasting change can take place quickly. He is usually embedded in the communities he works with: deprived inner-city areas of London UK, or squatter camps on the outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa. For the last eight years he has been working on an Indian Reserve employed by the T'Sou-ke Nation on Vancouver Island, transforming its community vision into a reality. (See "Power to the People: T'Sou-ke Nation's Community Energy Solutions" in COMMUNITIES #161.)

He writes: "Some of society's biggest challenges are yet to come, with massive demographic changes upon us (the Silver Tsunami) together with stresses created by climate change and rampant financial inequality. But there is hope: we have one big asset—us!—particularly the baby boomers. Boomers are one big community, whether we like it or not, and as such have always had a massive influence in the world. We must use this power, not in our previous selfish ways, but through our wisdom gained, activism learned, and compassion for all sentient beings on this Earth. Courage, Compassion, and Cooperation—a new Mantra for our new age."

Participants at a "Dare to Age Well in Community" workshop: revolutionizing what it means to grow old.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Moore