

## Making sense of inter-generation tension

Oh, all right then. It's down to me. After all, I was born in 1947, which makes me prime candidate for the job of defending baby boomers.

I'm reluctant. I don't want to start a word war with the mayor; and I don't actually buy into the notion that those born between 1946 and 1964 constitute a generation that behaves and thinks with any sort of cohesive pattern.

In fact, we're not even a generation. Generations last 30 years, I was taught. We're a cohort, invented by social scientists for research purposes, and seized on by marketers bent on instilling buying habits.

And are we all the same? The hell we are. We were first out of the traps sprung by post-World War II liberalism, and that meant a lot of freedom, individuality, drugs and questionable music.

We were the last to get free education and the first to benefit from house price inflation, even though many seem to forget it was a bumpy road, with big interest rate highs and leaky building standards.

That's the thing that seems to have got Mr Holdom's chains in a twist - the fact we own all this valuable property and that's going to prevent some future-letter-of-the-alphabet generation ever affording a home.

He might be right there, but not for the reasons he advances - that we're "greedy", "extremely selfish, the most selfish generation we've known".

On the law of averages, some members of every generation will be like that. Take for instance the Auckland real estate agent who tried to convince a judge he couldn't survive the loss of his Aston Martin after a drink-driving sentence. He didn't look like a BB to me. More Gen-X.

I've just finished a book about Hospice Taranaki and I can tell you the many BBs among its 800 volunteers epitomise the extraordinary self-less-ness of most people of any age in this province.

In my experience, some people my age have found themselves asset-rich (and cash barely adequate) through happenstance rather than financial genius or conniving. Through bloody hard work, too.

Our parents (I suspect mine were typical) made it clear we would inherit what they had accumulated through the same work ethic, but not until they passed on. And we didn't begrudge them taking the occasional ship cruise. We didn't accuse them of selfishness.

When the inheritances came through, many of us - in fact, every single person I know in my age group - passed a fair whack straight on to the kids to help them with student loans and to buy their first property. There was no "you'll have to wait till I die" stuff. They needed it now, and many of them got it.

Mr Holdom seems worried that we're demanding things of his council while at the same time decrying the prospect of rates rises. Paradoxically, I write this on a day when the council disclosed the prospect of rates going up nearly five percent - about double the rate of inflation.

JT column for March 4 2017 – baby boomers

What are we BBs seeking? That New Plymouth be an age-friendly community is one prospect the aged are investigating (mainly using money they raised themselves, incidentally). Note that's "age" friendly. No "d".

I don't know what that will involve, but early indications are we're already mostly there and all that's needed is relatively inexpensive tweaking to ensure we enfeebled citizens can get about safely.

Another thing that troubles the mayor is the political power BBs supposedly wield. Hello? Older generations have always had that. BBs had to endure what seemed an interminable age of political dominance by the war generation. Already, the Gen-Zeds or whoever are getting just as impatient with the Gen-Xers.

A thing he may have forgotten is that his generation is probably the first ever to enjoy a significant advantage over the previous bunch - native confidence with new communications technology. That represents quite a lot of political oomph.

One other point: splurging our money on travel (as one recent headline claimed) won't be the death of home ownership for next generations. Rather, the real threat to family legacies lies in the growth of retirement villages - from which little in the way of inheritances emerge.

Let's end on a conciliatory note. They were half a dozen words in a 5000-word article. The rest of what he said made a lot of sense to me. There's a whole mayoralty ahead of us to see how it pans out.