

What generation gap?

By Jesse Rifkin

"You will never guess who I saw in concert last weekend!" my grandfather exclaimed. He could barely contain his excitement.

"Who?" I inquired, genuinely curious.

"Herman's Hermits!"

Silence. "Who?"

My grandfather was shocked. "You've never heard of Herman's Hermits?"

No, I hadn't.

"But there were kids at the concert!"

Really?

"Well, they were about your father's age and up."

I am 18. My father is 46.

The generation gap is a natural consequence of life. As futurist Ray Kurzweil wrote, "We won't experience 100 years of progress in the 21st century — it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today's rate)."

People are a product of the era in which they grew up. My father was 13 years old when "Star Wars" premiered, and people his age went crazy for the special effects, which pioneered a breakthrough in the film industry. People my grandfather's age thought the film was too focused on fighting and explosions, unlike the more plot-heavy films of years past. For my generation, the film is dated — after all, free downloadable programs are available online that allow users to create special effects more realistic than the ones considered cutting-edge in 1977.

More important, changes in technology result in changes in mindset. Frank Luntz elaborated on this in his 2009 book "What Americans Really Want ... Really." My grandfather's generation grew up with only three television channels (which would frequently show the same program simultaneously), while my generation has thou-

sands of channels at our disposal.

Already in my 18-year lifetime, the world has changed dramatically. E-mail is my communication method of choice, while my younger brother prefers Facebook. I grew up watching videos on a VCR, but I doubt today's kindergarteners even know what a VCR is. I may be part of the last generation that will remember physical books and printed newspapers. Such societal changes are inevitable, because the future keeps coming at us.

Recently, my 9-year-old cousin was quoting her favorite television show, "iCarly." I responded by quoting what was easily my favorite program when I was her age, the 1997-2001 cartoon "Recess." Almost every person my age knows it. She said she had never heard of it. I am only 18, but at that moment, for the first time in my life, I felt old.

I did some research on Herman's Hermits — using Wikipedia, not the dusty World Book Encyclopedia on my grandparents' bookcase. It turns out that the band used to be fairly popular. I listened to their 1965 hit "I'm Henry the Eighth, I Am" online, and — after getting over the fact that a song with that title reached No. 1 — I started playing the tune on the piano. My grandfather heard the sounds of the keys and entered the room. He sat down and began a percussion accompaniment. No drum set was available, but the armrest of his chair sufficed. I found myself really getting into it, tapping my feet to the beat we were creating. I sneaked a glance in his direction, and saw that he was doing the same. Together, we filled the room with music.

The world he grew up in had little in common with mine. But for a few minutes the generation gap was reduced to zero.

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