

# Generation Whinge

by Kerry Cue

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*'I'm driving in my car ... I turn on the radio ... Dada-da-da ... something, um ... You're a liar ... Da-da. Ooooo! FIRE!' All right. I'm no Bruce Springsteen. I was driving in my car, radio on, and turned off to the world when I heard voices. Natasha Stott Despoja was being interviewed on the ABC. She said she loved hearing people like demographer Bernard Salt explain distinctions between the generations. And I quote. I have to write 'And I quote' because I nearly ran off the road when I heard her following statement, so I podcast the interview to check the facts.*

According to Natasha demographers say 'Gen Y have all this stuff going for them. Blah. Blah. Blah. And the Baby Boomers, they've got all this money and all the best jobs. Gen X in the middle, you got the worst of everything.' Wha? Could she be serious? Gen X, born after 1964 and up to the late 1970s 'got the worst of everything!' This has become my new party trick. I drop this statement into any conversation and wait for the mushroom cloud of anger to rumble across the gathering.

Baby Boomers gawp in disbelief. X-gens agree and Y Gens, born in the 1980s, are too busy partying, travelling and sighing 'Whatever!' to care. The most interesting conversation, however, emerged at a lunch where the hostess was an X Gen. Even though she's just shown me photos of her primary-aged kids in London on holidays on her Blackberry in her \$2 million-plus house, she insisted 'Yes! We X-gens did miss out'. At the table there were 4 Baby Boomers including myself plus 2 No-name Gens. They were born in the war. Which war? (That would be a Y Gen asking) The Second World War.

We Baby Boomers, gagging on our Paella replied as one. 'You are kidding. You X Gens really believe you got the worst of everything! When we were kids Polio, Whooping cough and TB were still around. Dentists drilled our teeth with old belt-driven drills as if they were laying down sewerage pipe and then filled them with

amalgam. We've only got fillings left.

We grew up without TV, a phone or a car. Our houses didn't have heating except for wood fires or, maybe, a radiator. You sat hunched over that radiator, which toasted your front while your back froze. We got colds, chilblains and bronchitis, but that is how it was. We walked to school hail, rain or shine. There were often 50 kids to a grade and the reports were brutal. 'Margret was 33rd in the grade'. The strap and cane were still in use and our parents could wield a wooden spoon.

We had plenty of food, but the only take away food was Fish 'n Chips. When we went on trips to, say, the zoo, mum cut sandwiches. There were no snacks. No chips. No lollies. No money. We were never given pocket money. We might score 3d (That's old money for threepence or half of 5 cents) if we went to the shops to buy some milk for mum and that was a good walk. And, if you had the good fortune of scoring a 3d to buy a bag of mixed lollies, some kid would whine at you 'Can I have a lick of your musk stick? Go on. One lick!'

We had one doll or one cap gun, but mostly got clothes for Christmas. Our clothes, bikes and even shoes were often hand-me-downs. We never got our own bedrooms. You had to share a bedroom with a little brother or sister. No one listened to us. Kids were meant to 'be seen and not heard'. So we were always being told to 'go outside and play' or 'shut up.'

We Baby Boomers felt we'd laid down an Open Misère. (It's a term from a card game.) Our case was won. Then the X Gen hostess asked one question. 'Were you happy?' We Baby Boomers looked at each other and nodded. 'Yes! We were.' Then our hostess stated her case. 'We X Gens grew up in a time when divorce was common and expectations high. Parents started supervising our homework and what we did after school. All of you had freedom. You roamed. We didn't. We had 'play dates'. And we had to fit in swimming and the ballet and the rest. Parents started fussing over safety. We weren't meant to climb trees or skate board without helmets and kneepads. We couldn't walk around the block. We were driven to school. We got toys and stuff but we also got emotional hot-housing and safety hysteria. And our parents still aren't happy with us. We're doing something wrong. Maybe, it's how we are raising our kids. We put them in crèches or have

nannies. Maybe, our parents don't like how yuppie we are or how we spend our money or how we pay attention to all our electronic gizmos. Yabba. Yabba. Yabba. The nagging never stops.'

Whoa! That was harsh. So I'm asking you, which childhood you'd prefer? The one where you had to behave around adults, but you got to roam free or the one where you got stuff but were always watched? I know which one I'd prefer. Maybe, we Baby Boomers were the lucky ones after all.