

Fatally Effecting Social Change

“We need to die,” I told a friend recently in response to his query.

It was during intermission at a performance of the Glenn Miller Orchestra at the Coralville Center for the Performing Arts. He was lamenting the number of white-hairs in the audience, and the fact that they weren't being replaced by younger big-band enthusiasts. “What can we do about it?” he asked.

My response reflected a fatalistic and arguably morbid philosophy that significant change often requires an entire generation (usually clinging to outdated beliefs and prejudices) to die off and allow the next generation to assert its preferences.

I try to avoid deep thinking whenever possible, but when you consider meaningful perceptual transitions throughout history (slavery/integration, women's and LGBT rights, Donald Trump, etc.), they all evolved painfully slowly over time. Eventually enough people who were fighting the inevitable died off (or occasionally - changed their minds) so societal change was able to occur.

In one of my favorite movies, 1967's “Guess Who's Coming to Dinner” starring Sydney Poitier, at one point he says the following to his father: “Dad, you don't know who I am. You don't know how I feel, what I think. And if I tried to explain it the rest of your life you will never understand. You are 30 years older than I am. You and your whole lousy generation believes the way it was for you is the way it's got to be. And not until your whole generation has lain down and died will the dead weight of you be off our backs!”

A tad melodramatic, but accurate. This is not to say that we oldsters may as well just cave to whatever the whippersnappers feel the social flavor-of-the-month may be, but it does cause me to periodically question my own long-held beliefs in the face of tides that more and more seem to be turning against me.

I'd hate for anyone to think it's necessary for me to die in order for desired changes to occur, so I have engaged in an increasingly desperate effort to avoid becoming (or at least appearing) out of touch with the current generation. I listen

to as much satellite radio top 40 every day as I can stand, and I'm seriously considering buying some clothes that were actually manufactured in the current century. I was ready to throw away my Birkenstocks, but it turns out that ugly-chic is back in style these days.

I also try to add one new hip word or phrase to my vocabulary at least once every decade. I started using "cool" again in the early 2000's, but it may be time to add another. I googled up Top Slang Words of 2015 and found a long list of them, none of which I had any idea what they meant. One I thought has possibilities for me to actually use occasionally is "bufflehead."

According to huffingtonpost.com, bufflehead pretty much means "idiot," and originated in Pennsylvania. Example: "What kind of bufflehead doesn't like kimchi on his tacos?"

Despite my relentless efforts to remain "with it," I assume that some people somewhere disagree with me about something and are just waiting for me (and my fellow wrong-thinking geriatric friends) to die off so the injustice can be corrected. The buffleheads.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons is a native Iowa Citian, co-owns a business on the Coralville Strip and doesn't plan on dying - or changing his mind about anything - any time soon.