

“New and Improved” Baby Boomers



I don't mind getting old and don't hide the fact that I'll be 60 this year. I don't buy into the “50 is the new 30” BS – I'm sure it was coined by a fifty-something and not a thirty-something. Being a 25-year cancer survivor makes every birthday a wonderful event for me. Having had over a dozen surgeries and the scars to prove it, I marveled recently at a beautiful line in the novel, “Little Bee” by Chris Cleve. “We must see all scars as beauty...Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, I survived.” That's absolutely true.

I go to the gym regularly so I don't necessarily “feel old” although crossing off “doing a cartwheel” from my bucket list hasn't happened yet. But, I have to say I'm very much aware of my age particularly when I see the enormous generation gap that exists today with younger people. Yeah, it was always there, but I see it widening as each decade goes by.

You'll also never hear me say I'd love to be twenty again especially if I knew then what I know now. That kind of hypothetical thinking doesn't work for me. I seldom find young people with “old souls” because so many see themselves as invincible with no eye towards the future. Everything is me, me, me, now, now, now.

I say all this because I read an article in the WSJ entitled, “How to Market to an Aging Boomer: Flattery, Subterfuge and Euphemism.” Apparently, corporations have had to redesign packaging and change marketing strategies to accommodate aging baby boomers.

For example, shower grab bars are now called “Belay shower

handrail" named for the rock-climbing technique! Even Kleenex has redesigned its floral patterned boxes to reflect contemporary designs. Operators at ADT who answer questions about medical-alert alarms (now called "companion services") are trained not to remind boomers that they've aged.

According to Ocean Spray Cranberries Inc.'s CEO, "We don't do anything to remind boomers that they are getting older." Well, whether cranberry guy reminds me or not, I'm still getting older. "Boomers are much more concerned with a product's appearance, not just its utility." Amazing.

Stores are redesigning aisles so that boomers won't consider themselves shopping in the "old person's" section of the store. Companies have changed the printing on their products to accommodate diminishing eyesight and others have changed their packaging to avoid using yellows and blues – two colors that apparently don't appear as sharply distinct to aging eyes.

Whoopi Goldberg is now advertising "Poise," a product for older women. I found the whole thing ludicrous but I won't get into any specifics in deference to any male readers because what I'd have to say would be TMI.

The whole thing is remarkable. I know hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on advertising and marketing – dollars surely wasted on me. I've no doubt that marketing has caused severe financial problems for many people. Marketing is designed to convince people they "deserve" something now, without saving for it.

I must admit, though, that I have bought two things because of advertising. One, "I Can't Believe It's Not Butter" because Fabio was its spokesman, and, two, "Old Spice Body Wash" for my husband because of the commercials starring Isaiah Mustaffa. When I asked my husband what it says about me when I've bought only two items because of two ads starring

gorgeous men, he quickly replied, "because you're shallow?" That may be, but I wouldn't continue to buy the products if they weren't any good.

I just don't ever remember older generations worrying about packaging, colors or what a product was called. I have to think that the boomers are vain, self-absorbed, somewhat narcissistic people who simply refuse to acknowledge their own mortality, which is now causing the corporations to change their way of doing business.

"Depends" are now packaged differently and touted as "looking and feeling like underwear." Whether you want to call Depends "diapers" or "well-fitting underwear," and whether they're stacked like diapers or are now in smaller packs hanging on hooks, the fact remains they're for people who are incontinent. Period. End of story.

Like I said, there's hundreds of millions of dollars spent on marketing and boomers are the ones with buying power so companies have to do whatever it takes to get their piece of the pie. We start dying the day we're born. The use of flattery, subterfuge and euphemism isn't going to change that fact.

Boomers just don't get it.