

Everyboomer

B is for Boomer



by Doug Carpenter

Knowing how hurried and harried you probably are at this busy time of year, I thought the least I could do was spare you the usual mental heavy lifting and go a little easier on you with this month's *Everyboomer*. So grab a cup of hot cocoa, pull up a comfy chair, and join me in paging through a picture book-style rediscovery of the good, old "A-B-Cs" we all grew up with... Baby Boomer style.



A
is for
Air Guitar.

It probably would've been smarter to begin with something I could actually show you a picture of — which in this instance I obviously can't since technically "air guitars" consist purely of air and are, therefore, invisible. But Boomers have never let the fact that something doesn't exist stand in our way [...like the fact that we look absolutely nothing like rock stars, and can't really play the guitar.]

At least not when it was so totally awesome to jump around pretending that we were musical geniuses like, say, Eric Clapton or Duane Allman — whose respective legendary performances on Derek and the Dominos' 1970 classic *Layla* put it at the top of a multitude of "Most Popular Songs for Playing Air Guitar to" lists. [The guitars in the graphic, by the way, are the actual instruments they played on that fabled recording. When it comes to playing make believe, we Boomers are all about authenticity.]



B
is for
Beatlemania.

As much as thumbing our noses at authority may have been the Baby Boomers' unofficial favorite pastime, we really weren't trying to push our parents' sanity over the edge with the volume [...both decibel level and amount of hair...] that distinguished our music from theirs. [When it's that *easy*, though, it's just *so* hard to resist.]

But if they'd only known what would be coming later [...think heavy metal, punk rock and the "Maybe they're born with it, maybe it's Maybelline" stage presence of KISS...], John, Paul, George and Ringo — the by-comparison not-really-that-shaggy-headed British "invaders" that American teenagers went first mad and then "mod" for — might not have scared them so much.



C
is for
Car.

For a generation of youth yearning if not to leave town completely then at least to escape adult supervision for a Saturday night of good, clean teen fun, it was the Holy Grail of freedom. Their own set of wheels! [The very typical hippie-ish girl pictured above may have been quite happy to have that little red Volkswagen "Bug." But chances are she was "California dreaming" of upgrading to a full VW Microbus, complete with peace-and-love psychedelic paint job.]



D
is for
Denim.

According to the TV ads, cotton is "The Fabric of Our Lives." But denim is "The Jeans of Our Genes." Levi Strauss. Lee Riders. Wranglers. Even Guess?, I guess. But whatever the brand, you'll never tear them off us [...although the more you do, the better we seem to like the way they look. Long live "counterculture chic!"]



E
is for
Encyclopedia.

It was where we all went to copy — sorry, I mean *research* — our grade school reports. And without it, a whole generation of door-to-door salesmen would probably have had considerably poorer upper body strength. But progress takes no prisoners. Introduced in 1768, the Encyclopedia Britannica's 32-volume/32,640-page 2010 edition will be the last printed and bound set that will ever be published. I suppose now we'll just have to print out a hard copy of the Internet... all 1.8 billion+ websites and 6 billion+ pages of it. [It should look really sharp in your bookcase, too — assuming you have the nearly 19 miles of shelf space it would fill.]



F
is for
Fad.

The pop culture claim frequently asserted during the Boom Generation's formative years that "Kids" would "Say the Darnedest Things" was nothing compared with the fleetingly fad-favored things they apparently can also be convinced to buy and/or do. Like the ridiculous

amount of money we spent on hula-hoops, pet rocks, puka beads, mood rings and that '60s fashion sensation, "wet look" crinkly vinyl go-go boots.

It could've been a lot worse, though. If those boots had come out 10 years earlier, some perky teen might've worn them with her poodle skirt when the gang went out to swallow live goldfish or try to stuff two dozen people into a phone booth. [And you certainly wouldn't want to look ridiculous when you're doing that.]



G
is for
Grass.

What a difference a few decades can make. A series of breakthrough discoveries about the medical applications of marijuana and you have a generation of younger people wondering if their *elders* aren't "hitting the weed a little too hard." [And a once highly-divisive controversy goes up in smoke.]



H
is for
Hair.

Once had a lot of it and loved it. Now losing most of it and hate it. Oh, yeah. And they made a Broadway show about it with naked people singing and dancing. [I don't think any of them were *bald*, though.]



I
is for
Inspiration.

It was the indisputable lifeblood of the generation's idealism. From Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech, Boomers derived a vision of a world in which all people would one day be equal and free. Mother Teresa's selfless service to humanity set a standard for placing the needs of others ahead of our own. Boxer Muhammad Ali's controversial story illustrated the potentially-powerful impact of having the courage of your convictions. And living the lessons they learned, those Boomers have tried to inspire others.

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J
is for
Jujubes.

Easily mistaken for their slightly more malleable cousins Jujufruits, original Jujubes were the Post Grape Nuts cereal of candy. Absent any effort to pre-soften them prior to attempting to actually chew them, they were basically fruit-flavored gummi-gravel. [Brought to you, no doubt, by the same fine folks who manufactured the hard, sugary suckers our childhood dentists self-servingly “rewarded” us with at the end of every office visit.]



K
is for
Kennedy.

We once had so many. The heroic one with the Camelot mystique. The idealistic one with the winning smile and the great hair. And the one who was left to bravely carry the family name forward. One by one, we lost them all — but never their memory or their legacy.



L
is for
Lunch Box.

More than merely representing a means for transporting our midday sustenance to school, this “L” could also stand for the love that went into making what went into these usually-corny, generally-garish and unquestionably marketing-motivated metal boxes. [And that didn’t bother us one bit.]



M
is for
Ms.

Although it had been around since the 17th century, when this term came proudly into its own alongside Miss and Mrs. as appropriate

forms of address for women, it resonated powerfully with the simultaneously-accelerating fight for women’s rights. The decision of feminist trailblazer Gloria Steinem to make it the name of the new magazine she launched in 1971 secured its place in our language and our culture.



N
is for
Nuclear.

Fortunately, when we were practicing hiding under our classroom desks for “protection” from possible radioactive fallout or practicing in the hallway to be ready to “march calmly and orderly in a single line” to the school’s basement bomb shelter, it took our minds off the societal and political wars that were brewing in so many homes and communities during the turbulent ’50s and ’60s. [Ironically, wasn’t it? At any moment, a nuclear weapon could’ve exploded even as the nuclear family progressively imploded. Happy days, indeed.]



O
is for
Open.

We liked “open” things. Open minds welcomed new ideas; open hearts welcomed new friends; and open admissions offered greater educational opportunity; while “open marriages” offered interesting social interaction possibilities best explored privately behind closed doors.



P
is for
Pong.

Considered to be the very first “video game,” Pong, as it was known in its early 1970s public arcade heyday, was actually called “Table Tennis for Two” when it was invented in 1958 by William Higinbotham, a Brookhaven National Labs physicist who was also a member of the team of scientists who developed [...Ready for this?...] the first nuclear bomb.

Fun fact: Even though he earned patents for more than 20 *other* inventions over the course of his distinguished career, he didn’t take one out

on — or ever make a single penny *from* — the one that people probably enjoyed the most. [Certainly more than the bomb.]



Q
is for
Quaalude.

Pong may well have been our “gateway drug” to society’s life-altering addiction to electronic gaming. But as drugs go, it just doesn’t have the same cultural cachet as the legendary “Lude.” You do have to give the Quaalude its props, however, if only for its amazing staying power.

How many other pills’ claim to pharmaceutical fame could stretch from being the “Little Helper” that got many an overextended Mommy through her trying day in the ’50s to fueling the groovy vibe of the late ’60s/early ’70s party scene and still be around today to make headlines as a date rape drug popular among celebrity sexual predators?



R
is for
Radio.

That tiny titan, the transistor, was truly transformational technology, powering the portable radios that a generation of budding Boomer music lovers would smuggle into their beds — against Mom and Dad’s explicit instructions — and listen to under the covers by the glow of a flashlight, which they really weren’t supposed to have either. [Sorry if I’m retroactively getting anybody in trouble here.]

If it weren’t for our willful disobedience, however, there might never have been a rock ‘n’ roll rebellion... no MTV... no Pandora, or Spotify... no one wandering through life obliviously, often even dangerously, lost in what they’re listening to on their iPods. [Actually, I’m not sure whether to say “You’re welcome” or “Sorry” here. So let’s just go with the first one.]



S
is for
Star.

Star Trek. Star Wars. Starman. Boomers

have traditionally gotten pretty psyched over almost anything having to do with outer space. And why wouldn’t we? After all, growing up, our parents encouraged us to “reach for the stars.” And we watched as a President we idolized in our youth dramatically set the nation’s collective sights on the moon and the vast solar system that lay beyond it — and then recruited a courageous corps of astronauts to lead the way. As the Starship *Enterprise*’s Mr. Spock undoubtedly would’ve said, our enthusiasm was “most logical.”



T
is for
Television.

Truth is, TV shows didn’t really have to have “star” in their titles to capture our attention. Early on, with all of four commercial networks to choose from — ABC, CBS, NBC and, until 1956 anyway, the Dumont Network — Boomers would watch almost anything that was on. Sometimes even the test pattern. [Good production values, but not much plot development.] Considering the shows that hit #1 during our formative years, we were essentially raised by a surrogate extended family that included the likes of Uncle Miltie, Lucy Ricardo, Jed Clampett, Edith Bunker and J.R. Ewing. So if you don’t like the way we turned out, feel free to blame them.



U
is for
Unfair.

As well as being one of the words our parents would most frequently hear us whine when we complained about their rules, “unfair” would later prove essential to expressing the acute sense of injustice that has energized so many Baby Boomers’ desire to fight what’s wrong and make it right — be it the abuse of our planet, the unequal treatment of people or the pointless pursuit of war.



V
is for
Vietnam.

In its time two wars were fought, simultaneously and both as matters of principle. One in

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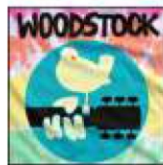
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the jungles of Southeast Asia, the other in the hearts and minds of people across America. Massive casualties were incurred, including the loss of limbs, lives and our innocence. There were no winners.



W
is for
Woodstock.

Billed as “3 days of peace and love,” it has become the archetype of the truly momentous event and will be enshrined forever in Boomer lore and the intimate recollections of the more than 400,000 rock ‘n’ roll revelers who were present to witness music define the identity of a generation.



X
is for
X.

You can’t spell “sex” without an “x.” [And sometimes apparently two or three of them if you’re in the adult movie biz.] From the sexually-liberated “free love” movement of the ‘60s to the escalating gender wars that continue unabated even today, if you’re looking for the place where politics, passion and personal

freedom intersect, X will almost always mark the spot.



Y
is for
Yuppie.

Take an idealistic college-age Baby Boomer and add a degree, a decent job and family pressure to “grow up... settle down... maybe find somebody nice, get married, buy a house and have a family...” and what do you get? A “Yuppie.” [At least that’s how we used to make them anyway.]



Z
is for
Zero.

Also “Zip” and “Zilch” — which sum up just about how much we Baby Boomers feel we have left to prove. Our story’s far from over, of course. The next chapter will simply be told by somebody else — most likely someone who we take a certain amount of modest but deserved pride in having helped bring into the world: Generation “Z.”

Born between 1995 and 2010, they grew up in a world that was nothing like ours, so there’s no telling what objects, ideas, values or experiences you’ll find pictured alphabetically alongside their “A” and “B.” I guess we’ll just have to wait and “C.”

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Doug's been writing for After 50 since its launch in 2004. His long career in advertising, public relations and community affairs has taught the veteran WNY writer that, if you put it in just the right words, you can convince almost anyone to believe almost anything. In that spirit, he would very much like you to believe that his columns are funny, insightful and informative. [Is it working?]



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Listings & Events

Adult Rock Painting Club

This club meets on the third Saturday of each month from 10:30am to 12:30pm at at Brighton Place Library located at 999 Brighton Road in Tonawanda. Bring your own rocks, acrylic paints and brushes. This fun, trendy new craft requires no previous art experience.

Volunteers Needed

Amherst Meals on Wheels (AMOW) is in great need of volunteers to: help on the food line preparing and packing meals; and driving and delivering nutritional meals. Volunteers are needed from 10:30am to 12:30pm, Monday through Friday. Drivers and deliverers work in teams of two to transport meals to recipients. Volunteers must be 18 years of age or older. Please call 636-3065 for more information and an application.

Hearts and Hands

Looking for licensed drivers to volunteer! Many of our Volunteers enjoy the forty cents a mile reimbursement rate. Imagine driving 100 miles a month and receiving a \$40 check. This helps older adult clients get to places they need to go to. Doctor appointments, grocery shopping or even to the pharmacy. If you're able to drive and want to help elders in your community this is the perfect Volunteer assignment for you. Call (716) 406-8311 ext. 102 or sign up on our website at www.hnhcares.com.

Ombudsman Volunteers

People Inc. is seeking volunteers with a passion for assisting seniors to support the NYS Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. Volunteers, called ombudsmen, play an important part by advocating and promoting the rights of residents who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. To learn more, call 716-817-922.

Work For Yourself Workshop

Have you ever dreamed about being your own boss? Join us for an interactive workshop where you'll learn to: explore your options, find your focus, make a plan, watch out for trouble, and connect with resources in the community. Call toll free at 888-339-5617 to reserve your place.

Free Respite Care

Free Respite Care Program held from 10:30am to 2:30pm the first Wednesday of every month at First United Methodist Church, 474 E. Main St., Springville. A nutritious lunch and snacks are provided. Call 592-7451 or 592-2768 to register.

Singles Social Club

Singles Social Club, an active 50-plus crowd. Dances on 3rd Fridays, at 7pm every month. Mostly 50's and 60's music by our DJ. At the Buff Social Club, 2565 Young St, Niagara Falls. Cost \$6 (members \$4). Also monthly activities include: Game Nights, Restaurants, Picnics and Holiday Parties with door prizes and 50/50 split raffles. Facebook for events and photos: Singles Social Club or call (716) 550-1232.



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