

# Hypersensitive to hypersensitivity

*"I bet that an 18-year-old Marine with his face down in the sand, under fire at Iwo Jima was thinking to himself, 'Gee, I'm glad I'm not a freshman at Notre Dame.'"*

— Abe Lemons, basketball coach, circa 1972, responding to Notre Dame Coach Digger Phelps about pressure associated with freshman eligibility in varsity sports.

At 54, I'm becoming a curmudgeon. I admit to an affinity for cardigan sweaters,



wood-rimmed sunglasses, and sitting on my front porch on a bright, yellow metal lawn chair grumbling about window-rattling bass speakers booming from passing cars.

If they were blasting the Stones, the Doors or Led Zepelin, and it was before 8 p.m., I might be amenable. But, curmudgeonhood creeping, I confess I don't recognize most music recorded since 1990, celebrities under the age of 50, and I fall asleep by 10:30 p.m.

Disturbingly, however, I do recall Al Jolson songs my mother and father sang along to, courtesy of shellacked 78 rpm records spun on a turntable encased in a polished, wood credenza with embedded speakers.

For the youths, 78 rpm

records were precursors to 33 1/3 rpm and 45 rpm vinyl records, and turntables were ... Ah, never mind.

Although curmudgeonly behavior is most associated with older men, my wife, Yolanda, makes a case for women when, rocking in her matching yellow metal chair, she shouts at the pulsating cars: "Thanks for sharing!"

She knows they can't hear her, but curmudgeons don't care. Satisfaction comes from the grousing itself, no matter how futile or infantile, not the reaction from other people. That's why curmudgeons click off their hearing aids after issuing angry proclamations about "the way things used to be."

Our two, 20-something kids attempt to rationalize their parents' descent into curmudgeonhood and dodge embarrassment with their peers by claiming we are precursors to hipsters, what with our sometimes thrift store fashion sense, liberal arts degrees, instinctive resistance of authority, and Anglo/Latina mixed marriage. Our indignant outbursts an old-school nod to rabble rousers like Kerouac, Lennon and punk rock. But they know this argument is window dressing. I read "On the Road" in college, listen to Beatles music and like Sid Vicious' version of "My Way," but that's about as far as it goes. For better

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or worse, Yolanda and I are decidedly middle-class folk, not hipsters.

Neither are we full-fledged curmudgeons. Not yet, anyway. I think.

Case in point, my take on the hypersensitivity some people have regarding our so-called hypersensitive youth, particularly college students. Elders have fretted over youths from time immemorial. I'd bet my bottom dollar Adam hollered at kids to "Stop eating those apples!" We know Aristotle griped about youths who "are regulated more by moral feeling than reasoning." ... They overdo everything." Another ancient Greek, Hesiod, lamented that "the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of

restraint."

Fast forward to the Lemons/Phelps exchange. In that situation, Phelps may have projected his anxiety upon young people who otherwise might not have thought twice about the situation.

In fact, the NCAA allowed freshman eligibility for athletes 44 years ago and currently the athletes' graduation rate exceeds the rest of the student body.

Today, hypersensitive adults agitated over hypersensitive youth blame helicopter parents, over-protective, lawsuit-fearing coaches, teachers and caregivers, and a 24/7/365 fear-mongering media for creating lily-livered youth. Potential "Curmudgeon in Chief" George Will referred to some Yale student protesters as "delicate snowflakes."

Well.

To be clear, Will was also making an argument about the stifling of free speech in academia and how some parents are overly invested in their children's lives, but many hypersensitive adults focused on the "delicate snowflakes" remark as affirmation of their own doubts regarding all youth.

All this hullabaloo forces a not-yet-but-almost-there-curmudgeon-in-the-making like myself to shake my fist and holler from my yellow lawn chair: "Turn it down!"

To hypersensitive young people: Get busy and do something for your fellow human beings instead of focusing on yourself.

To hypersensitive adults: Ignore the youthful rants. They'll soon discover life's not fair and learn to muddle through. Let them rage or whine in the interim.

Jeez, if this hypersensitivity fest isn't a first-world problem, I don't know what is. We should all take pause.

As for us curmudgeons, we can take solace in knowing that today's youths will one day join our ranks. From Adam to Aristotle to Will to baby boomers to Generation X, Y and Z, the elder-versus-youth beat goes on.

As the wonderful writer, and curmudgeon of the highest order, G.K. Chesterton noted: "The old man is always wrong; and the young people are always wrong about what is wrong with him. ... The practical form it takes is this: that, while the old man may stand by some stupid custom, the young man always attacks it with some theory that turns out to be equally stupid."

Hey now, G.K., be nice. That's not very sensitive.

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