HOW CANADIAN BOOMERS SPIRITED THE SIXTIES INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

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We oldest Canadian Boomers, born in the later 1940s, came of age in the Sixties. Entering our twenties, we discovered strength in numbers. When the Beatles sang, "You say you want a Revolution," we said: yes! Yes, we do! We were going to change the world. We heard Bob Dylan. The times they were a changin'. We heard Timothy Leary: Turn on, tune in, drop out. Never trust anyone over thirty. Some of us hitchhiked to San Francisco with flowers in our hair. Meanwhile, during Expo '67, the world came to Montréal. The year after that, hundreds of thousands of Boomers became eligible to vote in a federal election for the first time. We created Trudeaumania. We turned a provocative intellectual into a political rock star. Trudeau the Bold stared down rock-throwing separatists, removed the state from the bedrooms of the nation, and began turning Canada into a global beacon of tolerance and diversity.

Where earlier generations could look only to those who preceded them, we Boomers revelled in a vast peer group. We gazed out at an international youth culture. As teenagers, we had caught James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* and Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. A decent, law-abiding citizen asks the Brando character, "What are you rebelling against?" From his motorcycle, the leather-jacketed Brando responds: "What have you got?"

Along came the swivelling Elvis, and then Motown, *Baby Love*, soul music, *Midnight Train to Georgia*, and through it all the transcendent Dylan. He went electric but never stopped protesting. *I Ain't Gonna*

Work on Maggie's Farm No More. From our American cousins, we learned how to protest: civil rights, ban the bomb, women's liberation. The Sixties blasted into the early 1970s. The youngest Boomers were children, but the insurgents were eighteen to twenty-seven.

In his book *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium*, sociologist Michael Adams calls us Autonomous Rebels. We were numerous enough to create our own heroes. Those we accepted as "tribal elders" included the nationalist Pierre Berton (b. 1920), who attacked organized religion in *The Comfortable Pew*; political journalist Peter C. Newman (b. 1929), who took a scalpel to *The Canadian Establishment*; and Mordecai Richler (b. 1931), a literary superstar who rejoiced to puncture pretension and political correctness. *Oh Canada, Oh Québec*. Yet probably our all-time favourite elder was Leonard Cohen (b. 1934), the romantic troubadour who insisted that Magic Is Alive while celebrating sex and revolution.

By the 1980s and '90s, the Autonomous Rebels were producing leaders. Maude Barlow (b. 1947) fought first for women's rights, then against too-free-trade with our mighty neighbour, and finally, globally, to halt the sale of water rights. Linda McQuaig (b. 1951) decried the rich and reactionary so effectively that one of them suggested she should be horsewhipped. More recently, Naomi Klein, who wasn't born until 1970, has emerged as an international leader in the Boomer tradition. She is spearheading the charge against globalization and increasing inequality. What are we rebelling against? What have you got?

Back in 1960s Canada, female Boomers learned from such Americans as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, who emulated the civil-rights movement to launch "women's liberation." Feminist elders in this country included journalist Doris Anderson (b. 1921) and Flora MacDondald (b. 1926), who came to political prominence in the mid-1970s. Fiction writer Margaret Laurence (b. 1926) wrote powerful novels and battled fundamentalist Christians, and led us in recognizing that Canadian writers constitute "a tribe."

Feminism soon found younger champions: Margaret Atwood (b. 1939), Joni Mitchell (b. 1943), Judy Rebick (b. 1945). Women gained editorial control of Canadian book publishing, among them such figures as Anna Porter, Louise Dennys, Phyllis Bruce, Iris Tupholme, Cynthia Good. Boomers like Maude Barlow created their own platforms, and today new revolutionaries are reshaping the feminist landscape, among them Irshad Manji (b. 1968), Karen Connelly (b. 1969), and thirty-something Lauren McKeon, whose first book is *F-Bomb: Dispatches from the War on Feminism*.

Today, when Americans visit Canada, often they remark on the number of "visible minorities" that appear on our TV screens. Canadian Boomers took the American civil-rights movement (*We Shall Overcome*) and turned it into a drive for multiculturalism. *Everybody Needs Somebody to Love*. Down through the decades, French Canadians celebrated not just Pierre Elliott Trudeau but René Lévesque. Immigrant West Indians looked to Austin Clarke, who styled himself "the angriest black man in Canada." The Japanese got Joy Kogawa, who launched the redress movement with *Obasan*. An Ojibway, Norval Morrisseau, became the "Picasso of the North." And Buffy Ste. Marie gave inter-

national voice to indigenous Canadians.

Boomers created a diversity of spokespeople. Ukrainians: Myrna Kostash, *All of Baba's Children*. Chinese: Denise Chong, *The Concubine's Children*. Italians: Nino Ricci, *Lives of the Saints*. Indians: Rohinton Mistry. The list goes on. African Canadians: Lawrence Hill. First Nations and Inuit: Tomson Highway, Zacharias Kunuk... and look! here comes a gentle, post-Boomer activist, singer-songwriter Susan Aglukark (born 1967).

One-sixth of Boomers, or more than one million Canadians, fall into a tribe Michael Adams calls Connected Enthusiasts. Their outlook "revolves around a desire to interact with and understand others... They crave a sense of being 'plugged in.'" Because they are tuned in, creative, and expressive, they are more influential than their numbers might warrant. They "have a strong spiritual side," Adams writes, and are continually searching "for spiritual renewal and everlasting youth." They are not themselves rebellious or suspicious of authority, yet traditionally they ally themselves with Autonomous Rebels.

Their leading tribal elder is Marshall McLuhan (b. 1911), the guru of connectedness and the Global Village. Boomer examples include cyber-sage Don Tapscott (b. 1947), who heralds a new age of collaboration, and Mike Lazaridis (b. 1961), who invented the Blackberry. The Enthusiasts revere Boomer authors who explore technological connectedness, among them Vancouverite William Gibson (b. 1948) and Mississaugan Robert Sawyer (b. 1960). On the spiritual side, they like Robin Sharma (b. 1965), who dramatized connectedness in *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*.

The environmental movement is rooted in 19th-century Europe and North America. But it became a global force in the Sixties with *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (1962), *The Population Bomb* by Paul Erlich (1968), and *The Limits to Growth*, by the Club of Rome (1972). Here in Canada, Boomer environmentalists found a tribal elder in the strident and theatrical but wickedly effective Farley Mowat (b. 1921). Directly behind him came the living legend David Suzuki (b. 1936).

While looking also and again to Margaret Atwood, Boomers themselves began leading the way: Bruce Cockburn (b. 1945), Captain Paul Watson (b. 1950), Wayne Grady (b. 1948), Ronald Wright (b. 1948), and, again, Maude Barlow. Today, this Sixties tradition is alive in post-Boomer writers like Taras Grescoe (*Bottomfeeder, Straphanger*).

Moses Znaimer, creator of *Zoomer* magazine, calls himself a scout. Born pre-Boomers in 1942, he writes: "I go ahead, I suss out the terrain, I take some of those early risks, and I bring the report back. And the report is that we're into this cataclysmic change in human life." Znaimer explains that the Boomers are not going to retire at age sixty-five, the way our parents did. Given a longer life expectancy than previous generations, we are bent on creating a new life stage that will probably involve second careers and part-time work. Among the healthy, retirement is for sissies.

Political changes are harder to predict. Michael Adams writes that four in ten Canadian Boomers are Disengaged Darwinists. Look to this quiet plurality of Boomers, he writes, if you wish "to understand the roots of the neo-conservative revolution of the 1990s." This sub-group, more than four

million strong, belies "the stereotypical image of the hedonistic, rebellious boomer."

Members "tend to be younger boomers who, for a long time, watched silently and helplessly as their version of the Canadian dream disappeared." They include those infamous "angry white guys" who believe that Canadian society has changed "too much, too quickly, and for the worse." And they found a champion in Stephen Harper (b. 1957), a darkside Boomer who won a parliamentary majority vote by uniting Disengaged Darwinists.

But wait. While in the United States, angry white guys contrived to elect a self-indulgent whacko as president, Canadian Boomers led the way in driving Harper and his cronies from the corridors of power. Sociologically speaking, the Autonomous Rebels and Connected Enthusiasts made common cause long enough to elect Trudeau the Son as prime minister. Justin smokes weed, practices yoga, and marches for Gay Pride. We've spirited the Sixties into the 21st Century. Our work here is done.