

The Lost Dreams of Generation Jonesers Awakening in Millennials

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My daughter Rachel moved to Portland shortly after graduating from college and she'd been raving about it ever since. "You've got to come here, Mom, you'll love it. Everybody here is doing what you've been talking about and writing about all my life!"

I've felt like I was shouting against the wind my whole career as an environmental journalist and author. Living in Florida there has been plenty of motivation to keep me busy trying to better inform the public about issues which really are life and death to everyone, yet ignored by so many. What would I have to do in a town where everybody already "gets" it?

I finally made it west after Rachel had been there for a year. She met me at the airport (where we surprised ourselves by bursting into tears – we had never been apart for so long!), then ushered me to a metro train that whizzed us to a bus that took us into her neighborhood in the "City of Roses."

Portland is a land where dreams of Generation Jonesers, like me, and Millennials, like Rachel, have merged and been forged into reality by both teams. The Jonesers are those tail-end baby boomers who grew up watching the hippies rail against the establishment in the name of peace, love, creativity and self-fulfillment. Our older siblings and their peers inspired hope in us that we could change the status quo. Then, just before we were old enough to vote, they accepted defeat, and turned instead into a band of yuppies who decided to quit fighting the "man" and instead joined Wall Street, with a few renegades relegated to eccentric obscurity. Suddenly, we young'uns were left with the ball and no experience in keeping it afloat. Wikipedia describes us thusly: "It is said that Jonesers were given huge expectations as children in the 1960s, and then confronted with a different reality as they came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, leaving them with a certain unrequited, jonesing quality." We are the people who were so excited when Barack Obama came along – a man of our own age, espousing the ideals we shared, seemingly willing to buck the system and overthrow the powers that be in a way that our siblings had not achieved.

Our children were raised by our ideals, and consequently have not been received enthusiastically by the business community on entry to the workforce. As CBS reported in Feb. 2009: "A new breed of American worker is about to attack everything you hold sacred: from giving orders, to your starched white shirt and tie... They were raised by doting parents who told them they are special, played in little

leagues with no winners or losers, or all winners. They are laden with trophies just for participating and they think your business-as-usual ethic is for the birds. And if you persist in the belief, you can take your job and shove it.” The article goes on to describe the workplace as a battlefield with insolent, selfish new hires dissing the old guard, who are encouraged to coach or nanny these kids who “roll into work with their iPods and flip flops around noon, but want to be CEO by Friday.”

I pushed my kids to expand their creativity and to push themselves toward independence, and not to toe the corporate line but they’re far from self-indulgent spoiled brats as this industry-biased corporate line suggests.

I can see why Portland is such a coveted place to live for Rachel and people like us.

People in Portland love their environment and they aren’t afraid to protect it – Portland, land of the disenfranchised former hippies and the next generation who share their vision and have made it their home, is often tagged as the most environmentally friendly city in the nation. Green buildings abound, recycling is the norm, vintage fashion thrives, the farmer’s market is full of organics, musicians and creatives are revered. Public transport is in place, cheap and efficient, and you can hike across town in half an hour or ride your bike in a few minutes. Claiming more microbreweries than anywhere else in the country, people enjoy the chance to savor relaxation. It’s even legal to smoke a joint after work.

What’s not to like? Returning to Florida, I wondered how these places and their populations could be so different. As much as I love the sunny blue skies and balmy weather of Florida, I have to wonder, how did I end up in the land where old conservatives went to retire, and to legislate? Why can’t we evolve into a more forward-thinking , supportive community? I guess being here and working toward that instead of giving up and going away is the only way we’ll ever get there.

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