

Hobo Pancakes

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ANCIENT HISTORY, DAVID BREITKOPF, KATE LADEW

Ancient History

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“Elderquake”

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It was the latest craze. They started showing up at these events or creating spontaneous events all their own. But now they were in their 60s or 70s—materializing en masse at night clubs in the meat packing district, Lolapalooza, Lady Gaga concerts. Many had resumed their drug taking ways from their youth. Excessive as always, letting their hair—whatever was left—grow long, and tying it into ponytails or really rat tails.

Even the reckless nudity and sex made a return, though far less charming if no less confrontational. They eschewed shoes and it was odd and unsettling to come upon one of them in a supermarket or restaurant in a wheelchair, their arthritic feet cramped up into melted fists.

It all happened so quickly this phenomena, or Elderquake, as it was known in the Blogosphere.

Once again they showed their considerable numbers and marketing muscle. Millions swore off milk and cheese products. They called it “Lactose-Intolerance Week.” They tossed hundreds, thousands of Ipods, iPhones, Blackberries and Ipads into caskets and put on mock funerals for “bad technology,” declaring once again it was time to get “Back to the Garden.”

Of course we mocked them, and called it getting back to the “Snail-mail Garden.” I mean, who did they think they were? They weren’t young anymore. We were the young now. How foolish they looked. But we had to admit we watched them even as we laughed at their sagging bellies and breasts and their hairy ears. And we silently admired some of it, their joie de vivre, the way they lit their pipes and passed it to some other oldie. They could still hold it in and stifle a cough, could still dance despite their enormous weight.

Of course corporations tried to co-op the movement, but it was happening too fast—a decade of changes would take place within a month, and by the time some scheme came to market, the phenomena had moved on.

It had seemingly begun without warning, without cause, but sociologists and pundits teased out the conditions that coalesced into this odd effect. Many had retired and were living uncomfortably quiet lives, which they were not accustomed to. When the economy went bad, and never really came back or at least not their retirement accounts, there was

an underlying desperation to those quiet lives. Their divorce rates shot up at that time, though just as many were widowed.

The legalization of marijuana for medical use also played a role in the movement, though many it's true used it as a gateway drug to Vicodin and Wellbutrin.

As adults they had been conspicuous consumers, but in their youth—their idealized youth—they had lived freely, or really on the dole. Once they “discovered” work and money (as though they were the first generation to do so) they looked down on their youthful indiscretions and foolishness. But foolish or not, they knew it had been fun. And now all they wanted in their final years was to re-experience that fun.

Some sociologists incorporated the phenomena into their theory of the late works of artists, but the oldies just laughed and thumbed their arthritic thumbs at them.

Everyone had an opinion about it. The Blogoshere tried to categorize or denounce them as shameful, decadent leftists, but at least politically there was no consensus amongst their ranks. The movement broke too many laws of political and social gravity. That and the actual spectacle of watching them cavort—like the time they tried to levitate the Pentagon, with half praying for its destruction and the other half praising it.

Other instances of their Dadaesque escapades included the time a few hundred appeared at a Burger King in Pensacola, Fla. and ordered French fries, then drove out of the parking lot tossing the fries in the air like confetti. Only one person was charged with littering in that incident because he was the only one who paid with credit.

Another time they broke into a Macy's Store in Chicago, and rearranged all the goods—men's wear in the women's wear, women's wear in the electronics, and electronics in children's wear, etc.

But inevitably it had to end, not with a boom not even with a whimper. The whole thing lasted less than a year. In fact it was our generation that finally took back the spotlight from these dinosaurs. A handful of young Hollywood starlets started stripping in public places, they'd step out of a car and walk down a street. Passersby would take shaky three-second videos with their iPhones before the women hopped back into their trailing cars for a quick getaway. Before you knew it, every Hollywood starlet was disrobing in odd public places for a few seconds. It became de rigueur.

The Blogoshere's compound eye blinked in their direction and never again blinked back at the oldies. A few continued their profligate ways, but no one was paying attention anymore except maybe AARP Magazine. The rest—those who didn't die from drug abuse or other wanton acts—settled back in their recliners, remotes in hand, and watched the clips of Hollywood starlets cavorting naked down Rodeo Drive.

David Breitkopf has been a reporter and editor for daily newspapers, most recently The American Banker. His literary works have been published in Metazen, The Cynic, Wild Violets, Manhattan Times, and Poetry Miscellany.