

BIBBY'S BLOG

Research,
Reflections, &

Rants



Musings of a Multi-Focused Mind

BIBBY BLOG - "Boomer Barbie Turns 50...A Memo to Feb 03, 2009 Women Turning 50 in 2009"

I get some requests from the media from time to time that at first sound strange - like when Misty Harris, the Consumer and Social Trends National Reporter for Canwest News Service, contacted me last week and reminded me (!) that even Barbie (yes, as in Barbie Doll) is not exempt from aging. The iconic, best-selling, much-embraced and much-maligned doll is turning 50 this year.

Misty asked me if I could dig into my Boomer material and provide her with "a small picture of what Barbie's life would look like in real life if she were a flesh and blood woman turning 50 in Canada." It was an interesting exercise, primarily because it resulted in a profile not only of Barbie, but also of a large number of Canadian women who are turning 50 in 2009.

Well, since Canada Barbie was born in 1959, she found herself near the end of the Baby Boomer cohort (1946-65).

As such, by the time she reached her famous teen years in the early 1970s, she - like her American counterpart - was enjoying the music of the likes of Bread, Neil Diamond, Rod Stewart, and Simon and Garfunkel.

Influenced by the freedom movements that moved like a tidal wave through her entire cohort, Barbie had the freedom to live out life in ways that were virtually unknown to her mother and grandmother. She threw aside many of their constraints and inhibitions in being able to speak out and express what she thought about life, experiment as she saw fit with pot and sex, go to university, pursue the career she wanted, and - in the face of a variety of options - marry and have children. That latter decision resulted in her engaging in a tough juggling act in the course of trying for the twin wins of happiness and fulfilment in the twin settings of the office and home. She also was determined to find time to look after herself - time to stay fit, time to relax, and, of course, time to stay beautiful. After all, beautiful is what most people had grown accustomed to expecting of her.

In many ways, Canada Barbie wanted it all. And she had it all.

Now, at 50, life is quite different. Not everything has turned out as planned. The beauty thing has become increasingly difficult to sustain. All the effort, all the working out, and all the dieting haven't been able to neutralize the harsh reality that 50 isn't 15 - or 25 - or 35. Like most of her friends, she gave up smoking a few years back, but still likes a drink now and then.

It would have been great if both her marriage and her career had succeeded. Her career, she discovered, was at times seemingly hurt by her good looks. She often wasn't taken seriously or taken too seriously - not only by men but also by women. She felt she gradually got beyond that. But the time and energy she found herself giving her career made things tough on the home front. Her first marriage added one more case to the Boomer file marked "the generation with the highest divorce rate in Canadian history." She has remarried, is pretty happy, and intends to stay with her second partner for the rest of her life. Then again, who knows?

The biggest problem she has faced is the sheer lack of time - although money also has sometimes been more than a shade elusive. It hasn't been easy to give her career all that it needs, while being able to be the kind of wife that her husbands have expected, not to mention the kind of mother that her daughter and son have seemed to want and need. On balance she thinks she has done a pretty good job of combining both roles. When we asked her kids, they were not so convinced. When we asked her husbands, one was anything but convinced. Canada Barbie finds it all a bit demoralizing.

From time to time, she has reflected with her grandmother and mother about what they wanted out of life and how things turned out. What's surprising and intriguing to her is that they are more inclined than she is to say that they feel pretty fulfilled with life as a whole. They tend to be more positive than she is when they reflect on their marriages, the enjoyment they get from their kids, how far they went in school, and even their financial situations. Go figure.

"But hey," Canada Barbie reminds herself, "I'm still only 50. There's still time to turn a few things around. My 'doll days' may be behind me. But I still have some good years to find better balance in my life. By the time I hit 70. I'm going to have the last laugh!"