

Beginning a new chapter

by BROCK WEIR

Before I started to write this week's column, I had to take a deep dive into an area that I've either tried to rise above or gloss over in the last few years.

Actually, it was less than an area and more of a question.

Maybe even a question to which I was afraid to find an answer.

Would it be a game-changer in any way? Would I feel able to show my face in public again? Would I become a scapegoat for so many for so much?

Actually, none of those three questions were the questions at hand.

The question was? well, here goes nothing? am I a millennial?

Scoff if you must at that question, but it's a legitimate one.

What constitutes a millennial often differs depending on who you ask. It sometimes also differs depending on the context because, as I'm sure you've encountered in your day-to-day lives, there is no shortage of people who have varying axes to grind on the subject.

Millennials in recent years have been blamed for everything ranging from problems in the real estate market, rising food prices (at least when it comes to the inexplicably much-maligned culinary treat of avocado toast), the perceived decline in shopping mall traffic, and even for being 'snowflakes,' when all that latter criticism really boils down to having more consideration to the life experiences and perception of your fellow human.

The fact that people who criticize 'snowflakes' often seem to be the ones who melt the most easily when subjected to the least amount of heat, such as accountability, is the subject for another column. I digress?

Anyway, I was looking to see where I fell on the age spectrum after spending the last few weeks thinking about how my generation, and the generations below mine, will come to define themselves.

It turns out there is no clear definition.

Having turned 37 last week and, apparently I am indeed part of the millennial group.

This demographic, in its loosest definition, is generally and broadly defined as those who were born between the years of 1981 and 1996. Again, generally speaking, those who were born between 1997 and 2012, have become known as Generation Z, and anyone born later than that Generation Alpha.

At this point, I will spare a moment of quiet reflection for the people of tomorrow who will be saddled with the newly weighty terms of 'Generation Delta' and 'Generation Omicron' in order to look back.

Generation X, defined as those born between 1965 and 1980, by and large begat Gen Z; the Baby Boomers of 1946-1964 begat the Millennials, and the so-called Silent Generation of 1926-1945 begat Generation X.

Study the list so you know who to blame!

These generational differentiators seem to happen organically depending on specific circumstances. The Silent Generation, for instance, is a smaller cohort due to population declines attributed to the Great Depression and War, and, on the subject of conflict, generally too young to be an active part in the Second World War, unless you were born at the very beginning of the curve.

The Baby Boomers are, of course, the opposite: defined by the population explosion that came as a result of the end of war and blessed re-discovered stability.

Generation X spent their formative years amid significant political and cultural change while Millennials?yes, we were in the dewy bloom of youth when we quite literally partied like it was 1999 and some of us were convinced that the world would come to a standstill when our computer clocks switched over from 1999 to 2000? but, in my experience, we? have come to define who we were and are with the benefit of hindsight, and the help of some common cultural touchstones.

I'm sure the subsequent generations will do the same.

When Queen Elizabeth II first came to the throne 70 years ago, the incumbent British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was not alone in proclaiming the dawn of a new Elizabethan Age. The United Kingdom of 1952 was a nation still struggling from the deprivations of the Second World War, a crumbling empire, an emerging Commonwealth and more.

The idea of a second Elizabethan age, where the first was defined as the zenith of England's glory, power and influence on the world stage, was undoubtedly attractive.

The first Elizabethan age was the start of a new trend in the English-speaking world of defining ages and epochs by the names of the monarchs.

Scotland's Stuart dynasty succeeded the first Elizabeth, bringing with it, under James VI of Scotland and I of England, what became known as the Jacobean Era. When that line shifted to the House of Hanover, George I brought with him the Georgian Era, a time which, to our mind, generally applies only today to a style of architecture but meant so much more at the time. Upon the death of William IV, who, despite his name, is considered to be the last of the Georgians, his niece ushered in the Victorian Era which is not just defined by architecture, but an entire mindset.

What followed under Edward VII and Queen Alexandra was the brief but definitive Edwardian Era and, after that?. Well, the reigns of George V and George VI (not to mention the hiccup that was Edward VIII's reign) didn't see a generally accepted Georgian Echo, but those were dominated by two international conflicts that defined the time.

The second Elizabethan Age will prove hard to define.

While the monarch herself was a constant, it will be hard to pinpoint another time in our history where there was so much seismic change in such a short period of time. History will help narrow down the focus, but I suspect that those of us who lived through it will come to define it in very different ways.

These differing definitions are to be expected in an age or era that is defined by world events that transcend generational boundaries rather than stuck in firm and arbitrarily assigned timespans.

We will do the same under the new reign, but a new ?Carolingian? Era, as I'm told this period of time might be called if we stick to tradition, will not only be a mouthful but bring with it more diverse perspectives.

We're in a very different place than we were in 1952, but while we're not coming out of a World War, we are coming out of a global war against an invisible enemy. We're living in a time when, looking at Europe, war is never too far removed from our horizon.

As we begin this new chapter, it will be up to us ? Millennials, Gen Z, Gen Alpha and, yes, Gen X, the Boomers, and the Silents ? to define it, because we are, regardless of the year it says on our birth certificates, all equal partners in it ? and I for one am excited about the possibilities.