

One of the great humbling experiences in life (a topic about which I consider myself an expert) occurs the first time you and your spouse visit your parents with your first baby. Up until that time, you have been the apple of their eye. They fed you, clothed you, played with you, went to your little league games, watched proudly as you graduated from high school, and wept at your marriage. These people built their very lives around you, for goodness sake!

Then you step inside the front door with your first little one, they whisk the grandchild out of your arms, and disappear somewhere into the house. You stand in the foyer, essentially abandoned, feeling the way the dried, brown husk must feel after the ear of corn is removed. And if you bring it up, they simply give you that "Oh, are you still here?" look.

And soon you learn that this is simply the way of the world. We all have our day in the sun and when it is over, it is over.

Or at least that is almost always the way of the world. The only group that I can think of that has essentially avoided it, or staved it off anyway, is the Baby Boomers. Their births were heralded as new hope after the Second World War, their childhoods endlessly chronicled, their teenage angst revealed in by authors like J. D. Salinger and other truly miserable people, their young adulthood glorified as world-changing and even rendering meaningless all of human civilization that had come before (i.e. Don't trust anyone under 30.), their adulthood regaled in the Clinton presidency, and now even their culminating retirements transforming what it means to be old. I'm just on pins and needles to see how they'll redefine death. (I can see the magazine articles now: 'Baby Boomer corpses: Not just the same old stiff.')

Yet their sheer demographic weight is causing societal changes. We are even seeing it in schools these days as hordes of teachers who entered the profession en masse are now beginning well-deserved retirements, also en masse. Mitchell saw 13 teachers retire this year, or just about 7% of its entire faculty. That number doesn't herald disaster but it is a wake-up call that we are losing a large chunk of our content and teaching expertise.

Some have suggested that perhaps schools need to provide incentives to keep teachers in the classroom longer. The problem with that, of course, is that most schools are currently doing just the opposite. We offer early retirement incentives and allow retirees to remain on our insurance program, though the latter at their own expense. The idea behind this, 10-20 years ago, was to move the most expensive people off the employment rolls, to be replaced by less expensive new teachers, thereby saving money. It never worked particularly well, especially not now when we are seeing the largest impact. In many places, schools are paying people to retire early at precisely the same time that they are having trouble finding teachers to fill those vacated classrooms. (The problem also has national implications: as Social Security approaches the day of insolvency, we should be encouraging people to work longer but are doing exactly the opposite.) But how exactly

do you provide people incentives to stay longer when you are already paying them to leave earlier? Taking away the incentives makes more sense but it can't fairly be done anytime soon since people have calculated those incentives into their retirement plans. Mitchell has eliminated early retirement incentives for employees hired after 2001 but that certainly won't have any impact for the Baby Boomers whose retirements, certainly occupational and probably corporeal, will have long since become a reality. The focus, in the coming years, will now need to move to enticing many new people into the profession. Doing so will mean at least higher pay and a re-dedication of the profession to the meaning and value of teaching children. Those aren't bad results, of course, and they also mean that the ripples of the Boomer retirement will be felt for years to come.

And so, though I am loathe to admit it, the Baby Boomers are still having their impact, still making their influence felt in the world, still lingering in their seemingly never-ending day in the sun.