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ENGL2089 Section 2
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Times They Are A-Changin'

As I progress through college in online classes, I think of how far we've come as a nation and planet and how simple things used to be. Like most teenagers, I'd get annoyed when my mom and dad tried to tell me about their childhoods and how I had no room to complain about whatever I'd decided to cry about that day. Occasionally, I'd try to fight back and say that times have changed and things are different, but as I get older myself, I've begun to see that times changing, while more convenient and relaxed, is not necessarily a good thing. My parents lived through a great deal of the Cold War and racial tensions—the xenophobia they witnessed and may have even rivaled that of today as a result of 9/11. In the words of my father, who I used to resent to the point of speechlessness in his presence, “people had skin, back in my day, if someone was offended, they brushed it off and went about their day.” According to my parents, things were simpler, in-part, because they had less to think about. They weren't concerned about the amount of followers they had on Instagram and didn't have the option of crying when someone unfriended them on Facebook. My mother was not allowed to talk about politics, religion, or race at the table and it's now as if those are normal things to talk about at any time of the day. I decided to ask my parents about specific points of interest to me to see how much times have really changed.

The first thing I could think of off the top of my head was gun rights because my parents keep a BB gun by their back door. My dad is conservative and my mother is somewhere in the middle of road on politics, but this is something I know they agreed upon. My dad laughed at the

question and said, “a gun’s like a parachute, chickadee, if you need one and don’t have one, it’s likely you’ll never need on again.” I laughed at his joke and remembered a few articles I’d recently read. On April 20th of 2016, an Uber driver in Chicago stopped an attempted mass shooting because he had a concealed carry license. This is not an isolated incident, as an elderly man in Florida in 2012 did the same in an internet café. Many people are up-in-arms about gun control, but in reality, whereas there were 7 deaths by firearm per 100,000 Americans in 1993, today it has dropped to half of that.

My dad remarked upon how he was able to bring a rifle to school for rifle club when he was about middle-school age, and it was safe. Apparently, these rifle clubs were rather popular up until the late 1970s, and almost no one got hurt. School shootings were not a result of a rifle club member having a bad day. They were a result of delinquent behavior of someone with a clear mental issue.

It’s a popular opinion that outlawing guns would prevent tragedies such as school shootings from happening, but in-fact, the Columbine massacre, one of the deadliest school shootings in American history, happened during a ban on assault weapons. The two active shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were underage when they purchased the guns at a gun show. My parents both hold the belief that medical professionals and school teachers should be armed in the event of a tragedy like Columbine, because medical campuses, shopping malls, schools and many nightclubs are gun-free zones, which account for the location of *ninety-nine percent of all mass shootings from 1950 to 2016*. As mentioned earlier, civilians are absolutely capable of stopping an armed attack on their own, *especially* if they, too, are armed. The way my father explained it, history buff as he is was, “They took guns from the Jews and the holocaust happened. [The Guatemalans] took guns from the Mayans, and they’re a dying breed now. The

Turkish took guns from the Armenians and exterminated them. The Chinese government took guns away from its citizens and killed everyone who disagreed with the Chairman. Ugandans killed all the Christians, and so on. If a government tries to take away your defense system, that government is trying to kill you. Criminals will be criminals, they will find ways to get guns, but when the criminals get the guns, the law-abiding, gun-controlled citizen has nothing but maybe a knife.” It was after this that I thought it would be a good idea to bring up mental health, given we had discussed the mental health of any mass shooter.

I asked my parents about mental health and home life in the years of their prime. My mother, who is currently medicated for OCD and a few other things said that if you had a problem mentally back in the fifties, it was because your mother or father gave it to you. I looked into this some more and found out that my mother, though she may not tell me so, may suffer from battered woman syndrome given what the primary form of discipline in their household was—domestic violence. Animals were given the right to an abuse-free life before women and children in 1866. The phrase “rule-of-thumb” actually stems from the practice preventing men from beating their wife with a switch wider than their thumb. Women, however, were not the only ones who these laws effected. My father had told me time and time again about being “my age” and having to go out back and cut a switch for his grandmother to administer his punishment with. While my mother was still being punished for staying out late and daring to wear makeup, the civil rights movement laid the groundwork for the second-wave feminist movement which empowered women and allowed them to begin making a stand against their abusive counterparts.

As my mother sat and tearfully told me about her experiences with her father, I became more and more grateful that my father only gives me a hard time. I asked her if she also thought

her mother and sister had battered woman syndrome and she snickered and gave me an enthusiastic, “Oh yes!” This led into a conversation about anxiety, as my mother and aunt are incredibly anxious people by nature and nurture.

I asked my mom how she felt about me and some of my friends having needed to be hospitalized for extreme anxiety and depression. She laughed and said, “you have things so easy, what could you have to be worried about?” I explained to her that high school students today actually have the same levels *or higher* than those of mental hospital patients in the fifties. She claimed *Malarkey* again until I had another chance to tell her about the different things that matter to teens now that didn’t exist back in her day. I asked “Do you remember those old magazines you showed me from when you were a kid? Do you remember the advertisements inside that said things like ‘men never looked at me when I was skinny, but now blah, blah, blah’?” It took her a minute, but she remembered. And then she understood. America’s ideal body image has shifted from Marilyn Monroe’s fuller figure to Kate Moss’ heroin-waif chic. My mom recounted how she felt completely fine with her body until she was about 17 and the ideal body had switched. She had gone from eating cheese at every meal to keep her thighs where they were to doing speed and not eating for days to fit the ideal body image. I told her times hadn’t really changed much, and that women are still striving for things they can’t achieve in a healthy way. When I told her that female suicide rates and deaths from eating disorders were on the rise, and that people with eating disorders were 4 times as likely to suffer with substance abuse problems, she apologized to me. I asked her why she would say sorry to me and she said, “your stressors are different than mine, but they’re just as bad.” It was uncomfortable. I feel just fine, honestly, and receiving pity is something a real victim gets. That thought process led me into third-wave feminism. Boy, did I get an earful.

“How do you feel about feminism today, mom?” She shook her head and made the angriest mug I’d seen in a long while. “Those women aren’t feminists, Tai. They’re misanthropists because nothing anyone does pleases them.” I understood where she was coming from; it’s a belief she and I have come to share. “These women want to walk around almost naked and kill the men who even take a glance at them. They’re asking for it. Have some self respect.” I nodded and she continued, “When I was your age and still living with my dad, I couldn’t even flat iron my hair without my dad beating me and calling me a harlot. Asking for birth control wasn’t even an option. I couldn’t go anywhere private alone with a man without someone saying something to my dad. You want feminism? It’s not women who are 300 pounds wearing a bikini and getting as many abortions as they’d like, it’s women being treated as equals with men. It’s women having access to birth control. It’s women being in combat roles with men. It’s women being allowed to attend the same colleges and universities as men and not being reduced to secretaries in the workplace when they have a mind like Albert Einstein.” I smiled because I was proud to call her my mom and I was glad to find another female with beliefs like mine. The civil rights movement shaped second-wave feminism in her time, and won workplace equality for us. On the other hand, I asked her how she felt about me potentially being drafted with the Senate Bill changing the draft laws to be more inclusive and constraining. She sighed, “Receiving equal treatment doesn’t mean we’re built equally.” I understood at that point what she had said. Women aren’t necessarily physically built for combat. The thought quieted my mother and we broke for dinner.

My parents lit their after-dinner cigarettes and another prompt struck me immediately. “Tell me about the war on drugs: then and now.” My parents rolled their eyes; of course the college student wants to discuss drugs. My parents agreed that things like meth and heroin are

very dangerous—one would hope so—but they both agreed that marijuana needs to be legal like it was when they were kids, or so they thought. I told them marijuana wasn't actually legal when they were my age and they acted like I'd just blasphemed. Because of the widespread use of marijuana in counterculture in the sixties, my parents had assumed that it was legal. My mother, a veteran of Woodstock, was laughing hysterically when I had shown her the Hemp Timeline presented on Frontline labeling marijuana as illegal during the times she was using it. My dad chuckled under his breath and gave a self-satisfied grin. At this point, my mother attributed her drug use to her dad being so restrictive. I nodded in agreement because I remembered all the things I'd done simply because she had told me not to.

For an illegal substance, a lot of research has been done on cannabis. For starters marijuana smoke and tobacco smoke are not equally as carcinogenic. Marijuana smoke actually inhibits the growth of cancer cells and eases the pain and nausea from chemo. Not only does it ease those things, it also calms the effects of several mental disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, general anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It promotes creativity and, as of the 1960s, has been determined *not* to be a gateway drug. No one has yet to overdose on THC, the active ingredient in cannabis, and is not only less addictive than alcohol and tobacco, it's also *significantly less dangerous*.

They knew where I was going with the conversation— “Are you gonna ask us what we think about legalization now?” Of course. My parents agree with legalization across the board for medical and recreational use, so I asked them why they felt that way. “Well, they say it's good for you, don't they?” This told me two things: one, senior citizens are not always curmudgeons as the media lets on, and two, not only can my parents be proud of me, I can be proud of them, too. My next big question was about the biggest part of my life—education.

“What do you guys think about education?” They told me they think it’s wonderful, which may have been them continuing to encourage me to ask them questions they knew I needed for a paper. I borrowed my neighbor’s algebra homework to show them what people in the eighth grade do for math nowadays. My parents weren’t entirely sure what they were looking at; my mom chimed in first. According to my mother, algebra was something that was used mostly in college classrooms when she was growing up. I then explained to her the Flynn Effect in the most inoffensive way I could muster. The Flynn Effect in short, means that the average IQ test score *globally* increases about 3 points each year, meaning that as more generations are born, the smarter they have the potential to be (Flynn 173). My dad made a joke about kids being know-it-alls, but I personally attributed it to things like wider-available technology and better food sources. I asked my parents what they thought about technology in schools.

“Technology is great as long as they teach you how not to use it too.” I assured them tht I had learned how to look for books in the library, but I could not offer them comfort in terms of what my niece would learn in school. She already receives progress reports electronically instead of the old-fashioned way. She’s not yet in kindergarten, so this world is unknown for both my parents and myself. As an information technology student, I can’t help but feel somewhat responsible for it all—making technology more accessible might be making the natural world even less accessible.

[I want to add our conversation about the social implications of information technology and social media here. I need help closing after that.]

*I am aware that I did not cite anything and my reference are not all in APA format yet. I’ve decided to save that for last as it’s an easy fix.

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