

THE BOOMERS ISSUE

WAYS WE WERE

THE MUSIC, MOVIES, SPORTS, AND MORE THAT HELPED DEFINE BOOMERS' YOUTH.

The baby boom began in 1946, peaked in 1957, and ran until 1964, the last year more than 4 million babies were born in the United States until 1989. Here's a look at what was big when three sets of boomers turned 18 in 1964, for the first boomers; 1975, for the peak boomers; and 1982, the youngest of the generation.

By Elizabeth Gehrman



BEST-SELLING ALBUM

- ↑ **1964** *Hello, Dolly!*
Original Broadway recording (featuring Carol Channing)
- 1975** *Elton John's Greatest Hits*
- 1982** *Asia, Asia*
(Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, the best-selling album for the next two years, was released November 30, 1982)

BEST-SELLING SINGLES

- 1964** "I Want to Hold Your Hand," The Beatles; "Hello, Dolly!" Louis Armstrong



- ↑ **1975** "Love Will Keep Us Together," Captain & Tenille
- 1982** "Physical," Olivia Newton-John

HIGHEST-GROSSING MOVIE

- 1964** *Mary Poppins*
- 1975** *Jaws*
- 1982** *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*



HIGHEST-RATED TV SHOWS

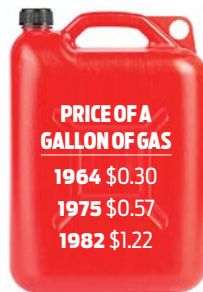
- ↑ **1964** *Bonanza*
- 1975** *All in the Family*
- 1982** *60 Minutes* and *Dallas*

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERS

- 1964** FICTION *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, John le Carre
NONFICTION *Four Days: The Historical Record of the Death of President Kennedy*
- 1975** FICTION *Centennial*, James Michener
NONFICTION *The Bermuda Triangle*, Charles Berlitz
- 1982** FICTION *The Parsifal Mosaic*, Robert Ludlum
NONFICTION *Jane Fonda's Workout Book*

MASSACHUSETTS UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

- 1964** 5.7%
- 1975** 11.2%
- 1982** 7.7%



PRICE OF A GALLON OF GAS

- 1964** \$0.30
- 1975** \$0.57
- 1982** \$1.22

RICHEST AMERICAN

- 1964** Howard Hughes (aviation, movie production) and J. Paul Getty (oil), \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion
- 1975** Howard Hughes, \$2 billion
- 1982** Daniel K. Ludwig (shipbuilding), \$2 billion

THE DOW JONES INDUSTRIAL AVERAGE, DECEMBER CLOSING PRICE

- 1964** 874.13
- 1975** 852.41
- 1982** 1,046.54

BIGGEST COMPANY BY REVENUE

- 1964** General Motors, \$16.5 billion
- 1975** Exxon, \$42 billion
- 1982** Exxon, \$108 billion

MEDIAN HOME PRICE

- 1964** \$17,800 (\$137,382 in 2016 dollars)
- 1975** \$37,200 (\$165,436 in 2016 dollars)
- 1982** \$66,200 (\$164,135 in 2016 dollars)

BREAKTHROUGHS

- 1964** All 1964-model cars have front seat belts; touch-tone phones and video-conferencing debut at New York World's Fair
- 1975** Bic introduces disposable razor; UPC codes appear in supermarkets; Paul Allen and Bill Gates form Microsoft
- 1982** Sony releases first CD player; emoticons suggested by Scott Fahlman, a Carnegie Mellon computer scientist

POLITICS

- 1964** Nelson Mandela begins serving a life sentence in South Africa; Martin Luther King Jr. wins Nobel Peace Prize.
- 1975** South Vietnam surrenders to North



← **1975** Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. puts South Boston High School into receivership in December, saying that desegregation efforts were not working.

1982 Fidelity's Magellan Fund, run by Peter Lynch, is named top fund over the last five years; The *Globe* urges four-term Boston Mayor Kevin White not to run again in 1983 (White does not); Updike (*Rabbit Is Rich*) and fellow New Englander Tracy Kidder (*The Soul of a New Machine*) win National Book Awards.

Vietnam; "stagflation" recession, sparked by 1973 "oil shock," ends.

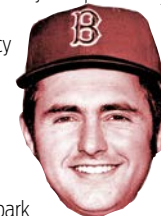
1982 Equal Rights Amendment fails; Vietnam Memorial dedicated in Washington, D.C.

CULTURE

1964 US population is 191.9 million; GI Joe introduced; Chevrolet is the top-selling car brand; Cassius Clay (later Muhammad Ali) beats Sonny Liston for the first time

1975 US population 216 million; *Saturday Night Live* debuts; *New York Daily News* runs headline "Ford to City: Drop Dead" as New York faces bankruptcy

1982 US population 231.6 million; *Forbes* launches list of 400 richest Americans; the "Tylenol murders" spark tamper-proof packaging, product recalls; *Cheers* begins 11-year run on NBC (exterior shots at Boston's Bull & Finch Pub)



BOSTON SPORTS

1964 New England Patriots lose AFL title game to San Diego Chargers, 51-10; Fenway Park admission is \$2.50; Celtics win their seventh championship-five players and coach Red Auerbach will later be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

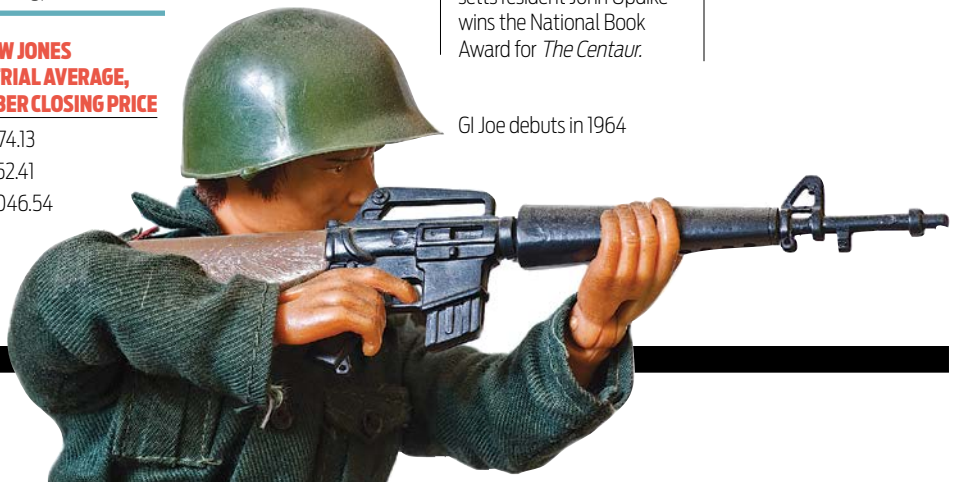
← **1975** Red Sox lose the World Series to Cincinnati in seven games; the Sox' Fred Lynn is both MVP and Rookie of the Year; Bruin Bobby Orr scores 46 goals, breaking his own record for a defenseman.

1982 In the "snowplow game," Patriots beat Miami 3-0 after snowplow operator clears a spot for Patriot kicker John Smith (but not for Miami's kicker); Alberto Salazar beats Dick Beardsley by two seconds to win the "Duel in the Sun" Boston Marathon. ■

BOSTON POLITICS AND CULTURE

1964 The Boston Strangler kills his final victim; the Prudential Center nears completion after five years of construction; Massachusetts resident John Updike wins the National Book Award for *The Centaur*.

GI Joe debuts in 1964





WHY I AM NOT ONE OF THEM

BY MICHAEL FITZGERALD

AM A BABY BOOMER, but I shouldn't be.

Today the baby boom spans 1946 to 1964. The start is obvious and tied to the momentous end of World War II. You see a half million more babies born in 1946 than 1945, cracking the 3 million mark for only the third time since 1909. And it just keeps going like that, peaking at 4.3 million babies in 1957.

The end of the boom is murkier. When I was younger, demographers set it at 1960, sometimes 1961. Then I remember in college being glad it ended at 1963, because I was born in 1964, and who wouldn't want to be first of a new generation? But ending it in 1964 has its logic: It was the last year more than 4 million babies were born in the United States until 1989. And it gives the boom a 19-year span, a corollary to what we think of as a generation. It's a good place to stop.

But it's also a terrible place to stop. A late boomer like me just doesn't have much in common with the early boomers. They had Murphy's Law, we had Moore's Law. They had LPs, we had CDs. They had color television, we had Atari Pong and the Commodore PET personal computer. They had the Berlin Wall, we had Star Wars, the Strategic Defense Initiative.

You see the pattern here. The early boomers were still living in a world that was mostly analog. People born in the early 1960s came of age in a world that was becoming digital. In fact, I have more in common with people born up until about 1994 than I do with people born before 1955—that's the year Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee were born.

Here's how we should really slice the postwar generations: Look at the digital technology available to them when they hit the ages of 12 to 14. The early boomers stay boomers; though they were born the same year as ENIAC, the first working all-digital computer, they don't really have digital technology shaping their lives. All those born from 1955 to 1969 are the Pocket Protectors, because we are the first generation to get access to digital technology. From 1970 to 1981, it's the Proto-Geek—kids growing up with digital technology in their classrooms and in their houses. Those born from 1982 to about 1995 are the Nerds Rule! generation. The World Wide Web is second nature for them.

Even these smaller slices are a bit arbitrary; really, everybody from 1955 to 1995 comes of age as digital technology is spreading into their academic, work, and personal lives. What follows is different. People born starting in 1995 turn 12 in 2007, the year the first iPhone appears. Smartphones make digital technology an appendage. That's a gigantic shift. Someone born in my era understands apps, but we don't necessarily think each new one is more useful than what we already have (I'm talking about you, Snapchat). Today's kids can't be bothered to answer their phones, and they think e-mail is archaic. Let's call them Generation Cyborg.

I don't know when Generation Cyborg will end and what will replace it. But my definition makes more sense than something like Generation Y (why? Because we like to name things). It happens that anybody can name a generation. There isn't a group that sets generations, as the National Bureau of Economic Research does recessions. Generations are named by whoever comes up with one that sticks; a newspaper columnist reputedly named the boomers. Tom W. Smith, principal investigator and administrator of the General Social Survey, one of the country's longest-running major sociological studies, says the generations after the boom are named "for pure convenience."

Naming the generations for the technological shifts would fit into the model created by Karl Mannheim, the social scientist who argued that generations were shaped by massive shifts in politics, like a Great Depression, a war, the end of colonialism. His point was that generations are defined by the thing that changes their life experience from those born before them.

Technology changes lives. Smith says I could make my technology argument about communications and make it go backward, too. You could have a TV generation (pretty much the real boomers), a radio generation, a telephone generation, a telegraph generation.

I'll think about that. I'm a little suspicious of a man who doesn't text. But at least he didn't call me a boomer.

Michael Fitzgerald is the Globe Magazine's articles editor. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.

