

Hall: Skinflints and the holy bicycle

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

People who live in glass bodies shouldn't throw stones.

In fact, people who live in fragile glass bodies worn with age should throw a little money now and then into the schools of their own grandchildren.

What good are elders if they aren't good to the education system? Unfortunately, many people in my gray generation are skinflints. Oh, these big spenders give a dollar now and then to a favorite grandchild, but they vote nay to a new high school or a new grade school.

A part of me understands (the wallet part of me). When you are 50, you hang a little looser. You contribute to good causes, most especially including support of public schools and public health.

But when you retire, your new job is mostly about not working. You get Social Security and Medicare. And that's a bunch. It doesn't make you rich, but it doesn't make you hungry either. Frankly, at this stage in life, Social Security and Medicare are godsend to most of us.

Granted, much of that income comes from all those years of paying into that nest egg for the later years of our lives. And after we have gone through the 65-year-old door, we are rewarded with monthly money. Even if that isn't a huge amount of cash for most of us, it does make a tolerable existence or better. Most gray-haired beneficiaries of Social Security and Medicare get money we no longer have to work for.

You can spend the rest of your days fishing in streams around the country, taking rumba lessons or learning how to trim your toenails. And nobody should say you don't have it coming. You can join the couch potato generation and you still get constant money coming in. You can soak all day in the tub and still claim monthly money - wet money in your case.

But I'll tell you the truth. It's harder to get a donation for a charity or a school bond issue out of people my age than it used to be. You may invest too much of your retirement nest egg into something as silly as a machine for automated chicken plucking. But you don't want to squander any cash on something as serious as a school bond issue. Too many of us squeeze a penny till it screams.

So let your kids pay the cost of schools for their kids, you say. You did your duty. Give your grandkids a fiver for Christmas and that will take care of any generosity on your part.

Just because you can back off a bit now and live off monthly federal funds doesn't mean you aren't needed to keep this education system thriving. Live well and take advantage in good conscience of the vital and wonderful healthcare our age inherits. But when it comes to showing gratitude for the privileges of living in this phenomenal country, don't stop now.

If you don't chip some change into the school system, if you don't care every day about the education of your grandchildren and the betterment of your town and nation, you're just wasting air that somebody more generous could use.

And then there is what is truly the greatest generation. The greatest generation fought its way out of a terrible depression and helped save the world from darkness. And yet they are less likely than my generation to whine about a little thing like a few bucks more for schools.

The fact is, school bonds are not as easy to pass around here as they were 60 years ago when this skinflint generation was first reaping the rewards of a decent education.

Frankly, many - perhaps most - of my generation fit a description that I learned during a couple of summers when I was 12 and 13 working for a carnival. The carnies had a saying about towns that weren't exactly big spenders:

"This town is so cheap it wouldn't pay a nickel to see Christ ride a bicycle," the carnies would say.

This generation is so cheap it probably wouldn't pay a nickel to see Christ ride a bicycle because Christ would give that nickel to the public schools and thereby shame the old skinflints of my generation into doing better.

Of course, Jesus had a dad who supported education.

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