

Tough to grow old gracefully



My Generation
By HOLLY SPANGLER

HAVE a feeling that we are, well, getting old.

Or perhaps I should say, old-er, as we're not exactly feeble or retirement ready. And yet, I've had this nagging sense over the past year or so that my husband, John, and I certainly are not the young, recent college grads that we used to be. Which is pretty much how

Rubes



Another typical day with the Scapegoat kids.

we've thought of ourselves for quite some time now.

It's not so much that we feel old(er) — definitely not that. But many of the people around us seem to be saying we sure aren't young anymore.

Like at the state Farm Bureau young farmer conference the past couple of years, we have looked around and everyone else looks really young. We don't even know a lot of them. The vast majority are singles, young married couples with no kids or young marrieds with a new baby. And then there's us, gathered in a corner with the folks our own age who already have two or three kids, talking about stuff like how kindergarten is going. It's sort of strange to feel old at a young farmer conference.

The same thing seems to be happening at home. The last county young farmer event we attended was populated almost entirely by junior college students and recent college grads. Then there was us, with our kids. Now, this group of young people is a lot of fun to hang out with, but I wonder if they were looking at us thinking, "Seriously, when are the old folks going to take the kids and go so we can really have some fun?"

As if there weren't enough subtle signs like that, our teenage friends are even pointing it out to us in not-so-subtle ways. It started a few years ago,

when our church's high school youth group members referred to '80s music as "oldies" — as in, "I just love oldies songs like 'Jack and Diane.'" Clearly, no one told them that, to be an oldie, a song must be pre-1970.

Then one time this winter, another youth group member was shocked — shocked! — to learn that John had attended high school in the same building that stands there today, where she also attends.

"How old do you think I am?" John asked her, equally shocked. "My dad went to high school in that building!"

Um, yeah, it was built in 1952. Clearly, we're not the young pups that we thought that they thought we were. What's really strange, though, is that this all has sort of a déjà vu feeling.

The revelation

When I joined *Prairie Farmer* as a 21-year-old a decade ago, I delighted in pointing out to then editor (and my boss) Mike Wilson that when he started at the magazine, I was in the second grade. This was good, clean fun, as we always had a hearty laugh over it. Over the years, we talked at length about music and other touchstones for our generations, and though Mike was and still is a pretty hip grown-up, I remember wondering whether he really thought he

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was still that young. In fact, when I came back from a spring break trip during my senior year in college and shared stories of how my girlfriends and I couldn't believe we got hit on by "these 40-year-old guys," he looked personally injured.

He tried in vain to point out that someday I'd be on the other side of this conversation, but I didn't really get it.

Until now. And so here I am, realizing, too, that I am not the fresh-faced 20-something I used to be. That even though I still feel pretty hip on the inside, the young(er) folks just don't see it that way.

I may have joined Facebook, but my presence is likely freaking out my young friends ... mainly because they fear their parents might join, too.

So to Mike Wilson, I publicly apologize for being that punk kid who made him realize that he, perhaps, wasn't as young as he used to be.

Now, neither am I. But maybe that's not so bad either.

■ **Comments?** E-mail hspangler@farmprogress.com.

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