Brexit and My Generation

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The week leading up to the EU Referendum was a weird time for me. I was 21, had graduated a little less than a year before and actually laughed when David Cameron announced that the referendum would take place. What a waste of time, I thought.

I remembered staying up all night watching the results of the Scottish referendum in 2014, and imagined that it would be the same kind of result for the EU ref too. Yes people would vote to leave but not everyone would and nothing would really change. However, during the week leading up to the vote, I noticed people sharing posts on Facebook and Twitter, saying how much they wanted to leave the EU, they wanted their hard working money to go towards the NHS instead and they wanted the UK to be "Great Britain" again. On the other hand, the other side of the argument wanted us to stay firmly in the EU, didn't want any issues when travelling around Europe and definitely didn't want the price of their favourite food and drinks to increase.

What concerned me the most at the time was how much of a total lack of communication there was around what the public were really voting for. Nobody around me really knew. My friends wanted us to stay in the EU, so that we could travel freely and quite frankly, they couldn't see just why we needed to leave. I spoke to my grandparents about it on several occasions, and they were sure that they were voting to leave. "We were fine before the EU, we'll be fine without them" my Grandad would say. It was at this point that I noticed the stark differences between the generations. The majority of people around my grandparent's age wanted out, as soon as possible. However, people around my age couldn't imagine anything worse than not being in the EU. Was it because my grandparents essentially had something to compare it to? Whereas me, and my generation, hadn't known a world where we weren't part of the EU?

I could see where my grandparents were coming from, but my argument was very much that yes the UK had survived without being part of a political and economic union before, but the world is a

different place now than it was when the UK first stepped into the EU. It was 1973. This was decades before the internet, mobile phones and the majority of technology that we take for granted today. Decades before world changing events, like 9/11. Decades before social media, GDPR, the Spice Girls and another almost successful World Cup. It was a different world back then.

When the result came in on that Friday morning, my first thoughts were, are we going to go back to that time, or become something totally new? Will this be the breaking, or the making of us? I headed into work and walked past a building which was funded by the European Union. I started noticing that little sign on the side of buildings all the time. How are we going to cope without that pot of money? I kept asking myself, and those around me, and even after the vote had happened, and people started talking to each other in offices again, and pubs didn't feel segregated by people drowning their sorrows and those celebrating, so many of us were still confused, bewildered, and scared.

But what I did find was, it wasn't the older generations who were scared. Definitely not on my estate, anyway. It was those around me. The teenagers to the 40 year olds, who had got used to life within the EU. People my age, who I'd only ever discussed TV shows and clothes with, suddenly had something to say. They were hurt. Annoyed at their parents and grandparents. Annoyed at anyone who had voted differently from them. For them, it felt like an attack on young people. And then there were the people my age who hadn't voted because they didn't understand why they needed to. Why did they not feel informed? Could it have been a different result?

Two and a half years after we voted the leave the European Union, there are still so many unanswered questions and so many of us still don't really understand what all this means and if it'll even impact our lives. Despite feeling like I was riding a rollercoaster of confusion at the time, I am in many ways glad that we did have the referendum. Having always had a keen interest in politics, I never really felt like there were many people around me my age who also did. I felt frustrated at those around me who would never drag themselves along to a polling booth to have their say. It seemed boring; like politicians talked in a different language and it's simply too much effort to make sense of what they are saying.

If there is anything that the referendum has done for my generation, it is that we realised that we do have a voice. And if we don't use it, there will be consequences. Those around me talk about the political climate as much as we talk about where we fancy going for cocktails at the weekend. It no longer seems like a boring conversation to have. They want to say their opinion, and feel that their view is valued. With a new generation more keen than ever to know the facts, and to use their right to vote, the future of British politics is more exciting than ever.