

Being an â??old soulâ?? isnâ??t just about age but an attitude â?? best nurtured by intergenerational contact

Description

default watermark

SF SENIORBEAT GUEST COLUMN â?? Thereâ??s a corner of Gen Z internet culture that has popularized the trope of the â??old soulâ?? by embracing analog reality. These proclaimed â??old soulsâ?• renounce social media and anything digital, instead opting for vintage vinyl or a hardbound book, for example.

Theyâ??ve taken to the internet in droves, insisting their proclivity for non-digital media sets them apart from their social-media addicted peers, making them â??old souls.â?•

While I appreciate a good vinyl, I couldnâ??t live without my Spotify and the digitally curated lists of songs I have yet to discover. However, Iâ??d like to propose a refined definition of the term being bantered about online: a young soul who spends quality time with actual old souls. Hereâ??s how I came to this idea.



Lexi DeHart is a graduate of the University of California-Berkeley awaiting a trip to Argentina on a Fullbright scholarship to teach English. (All photos courtesy of Lexi DeHart)

I share the same struggles as most people in their mid-20s. Iâ??m single, underfunded, overstimulated, and ostensibly directionless in my professional pursuits. I finished my college degree at 26 and entered a job market that was less than inviting. With my bachelorsâ?? degree in Comparative Literature, I took the first job I could find â?? as a caterer for a corporate office in the San Francisco Ferry Building.

It was a day like any other, as I stood in line for my morning coffee, when the split-flap sign in the Ferry Building terminal flipped to its next page. I gazed at the tumbling letters and appreciated the cascading

clatter of characters until a message from the heavens, it seemed, materialized in front of me: â??Learn how to play mahjong, Wednesdays 3-6 p.m.â?•

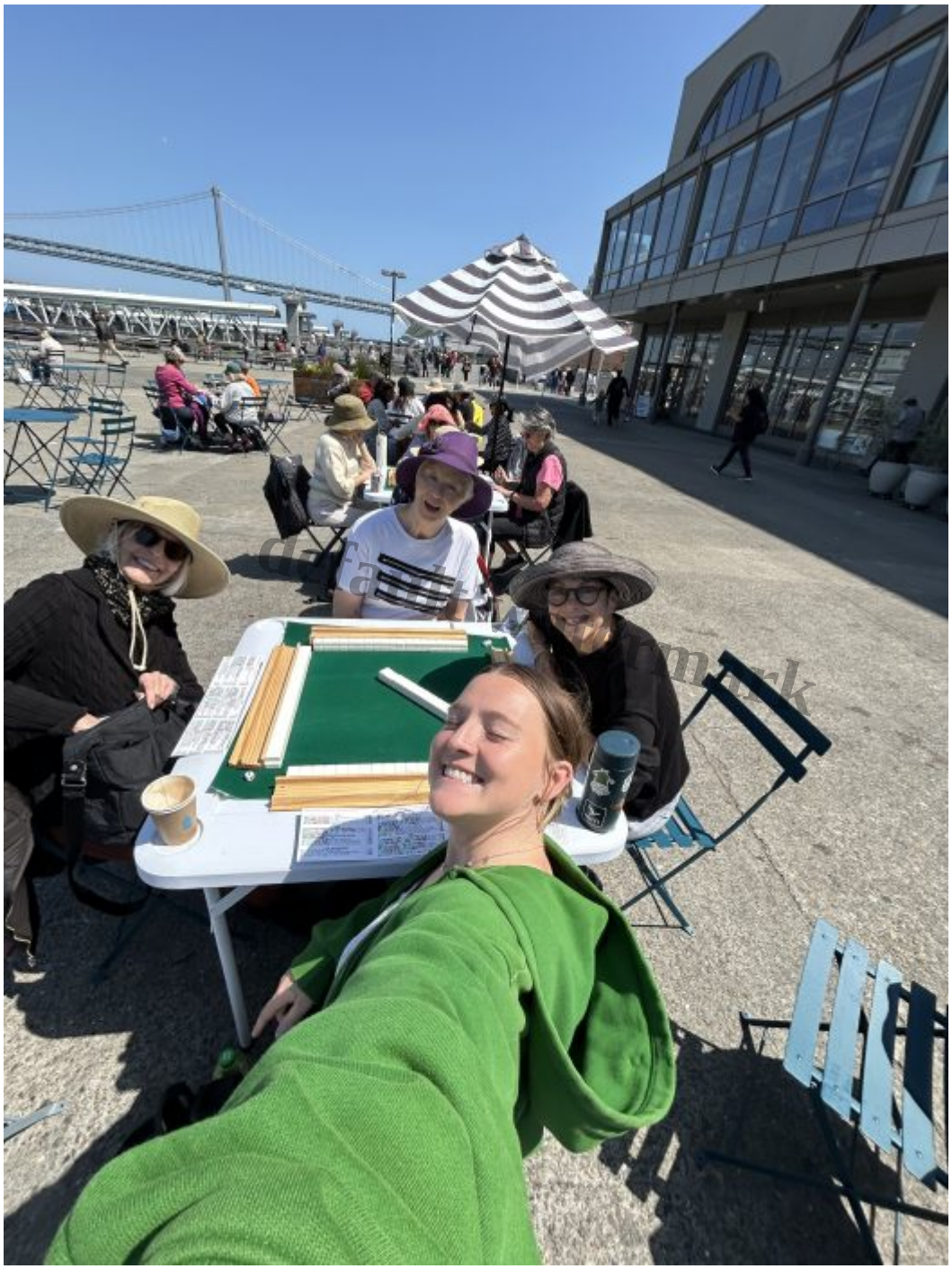
â??How whimsical â?? and positively analog,â?• I thought. Since the start time was when I finished work, I returned to the same spot after my shift. In a complete transformation of the space, dozens of tables were set up with mahjong tiles lined up at each one. Some games had taken shape and were already mid-round, but there was one table of three seniors that beckoned me with its open fourth chair.

Silence yields to laughter

I nervously approached and asked if I could join them despite my very elementary understanding of the game. Without hesitation, they pulled out the chair and welcomed me to their group. That was in March, and I have been playing with them every week since then.

Jan, Sharon, and Rebecca carried themselves with a poise that led me to believe they were seasoned mahjong players. But to my surprise, they were beginners just like me. They had a few months of active playing time on me, and constantly improving their strategies. It was a perfect group to learn the game with.

default watermark



Lexi DeHart, front; Jan Robbins, at left; Sharon Mortz, in back; and Rebecca Konkel on the right.

As weeks went by, however, our conversations began to stray further from the game itself and more into the realm of casual friendship topics. What used to be a silence filled by a mahjong question was soon filled by laughter or personal questions. â??Are you married?â?• â??What do you do now that youâ??re retired?â?• segued into talking about these womenâ??s lives in the same way I would talk to anyone else my age. Over the clacking of 152 acrylic tiles on a green felt mat, I learned that Rebecca is an avid swimmer and has made the frigid swim from San Francisco to Alcatraz dozens of times in her life. I learned that Jan founded the first rape-crisis center in the Bay Area in the â??70s, and I learned

that Sharon is one of the wittiest and goofiest bridge players in all of San Francisco.

All the while, we laugh about silly mahjong mistakes, and silently appreciate the undeniable beauty of a sunny afternoon in the late spring and early summer.

Love brings us together

I donâ??t claim to be an old soul because I listen to old music or appreciate a riveting game of mahjong. I think Iâ??m an old soul because of how easily I connect with these women who are 40 years my senior. One of the most organic conversation topics is our love lives (or lack thereof). We frequently talk about men and our romantic endeavors throughout our lives. Surprisingly (or maybe not surprisingly), weâ??re all single.

Not that being single is the only thing we connect on, but the relatability of being a single woman certainly transcends the barriers of age, wisdom, and lived life experience. History and politics certainly have their place at our table as we discuss the happenings in our world, but the truly meaningful conversations stem from the raw human experiences we all share as women.

default watermark

These conversations about romance and navigating both our 20s and our 60s and 70s are truly the most fulfilling, insightful, and encouraging conversations I have all week.

The conversations are clearly distinct from those amongst Gen Z friends, with whom I can talk about my dating life and be met with a sympathetic nod or the empty reassurance of not being alone. But their feedback seems hollow, as I know they only have as much experience as I do.

Senior v. Gen Z insight

With my senior friends, I am met with much more informed and deep insight. After all, these women have been through it all and have shared some of the most touching and invaluable experiences. Every week, I walk away from the mahjong table with a fresh perspective on life.

It was Jan Robbins, the spunky, mahjong-earring-wearing contributor to SF SeniorBeat, who piqued my initial interest in this publication. I donâ??t know why, but an entire newspaper dedicated to the happenings of senior citizens in San Francisco seemedw remarkable and was inspiring to me. I was further amazed to discover how many of my personal values aligned with those of an online magazine catering to a demographic several decades apart from my own.



default watermark
Sandy, Lexi, Jan and Anna in a game of mahjong at the San Francisco Ferry Building.

According to its website, San Francisco SeniorBeat is an online magazine profiling San Franciscoâ??s older adults, whose activities and backgrounds contribute to the diverse community life of this world-famous cityâ?¦We aspire to a society in which people of all ages see, hear, and benefit from one another.â?• â?? Robin Evans, Editor

These aspirations for a society in which people of *all ages* can connect are alive and well amongst my friends and me at the mahjong table. I can only hope to offer the same amount of insight â?? from the Gen Z perspective â?? that my senior friends bring to me each week.

Category

1. All Posts

Date Created
19/09/2025
Author
lexi