

Listen Without Prejudice (with apologies to George Michael)

By Sue Osborne

As I write this, I am thinking of my twenty-one-year-old daughter and how her online life is so very different to mine. My online world is full of Twitter, and Facebook and a dash of Instagram, as well as copious online articles and news stories about my profession, and topics that are close to my heart like literacy, photography, trivia quizzes and so on.

Rachael's online life is far removed from that. Sure, she still uses Facebook, but she is more likely to communicate via Messenger or Snapchat. I have just over 300 friends, most of whom I know in some way and have met IRL (in real life). Rachael has over 1200, most of whom she has NEVER met and many who are from interstate or another country.

I watch the odd YouTube video, but most of my TV viewing is Netflix or Stan these days, or even something archaic like a DVD. Rachael's viewing is exclusively via YouTube. BuzzFeed, Rooster Teeth, Tastemade and countless others are her staple viewing. She can watch these anywhere, anytime on her phone, which is her constant companion. While I could do that too, I choose not to and, if I have free time, do craft or read or write or play games. Rachael's screen is her social and relaxation life. If she's not watching YouTube (she has a YouTube RED account that takes all the ads out and gives her access to extra content), Rachael is playing on her Nintendo Switch, or with other online friends on the Xbox.

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The difference in our online lives was brought home to me this past weekend when Rachael went to Sydney to attend RTX (Rooster Teeth Expo), and meet some friends she had literally had for years, IRL (in real life) for the very first time. This is not unusual at RTX – many people meet for the first time at such conventions and some, according to a recent ABC news article <http://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-05/old-friends-meet-for-first-time-at-rooster-teeth-meetup/9398160>, meet their life partners there.

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Now, make no mistake, I do have a few friends, especially on Twitter, that I have never met before, but we have some kind of professional connection (we are librarians, or aspiring authors, for instance). These RT friends are connected to Rachael by the content she prefers on the internet. I find this incredible, strange and oddly inspiring. These young people are connecting because of content created by people just like them. One of the things Rachael likes about Rooster Teeth is that the content is shared with everyone, there is no paywall, and it is made by people she relates to.

They speak Rachael's language. The language of gaming, of memes, hashtags, of Vines, of Snapchat is how people Rachael's age communicate with one another. Listening to Rachael – in fact listening to a lot of my students – is teaching me new ways to reach out, to make connections to reading and literature in an increasingly online world.

As we have recently seen and heard in the US, following the Parkland school shooting in Florida, young people connect in the online world quickly, and in this case, mobilise themselves into action quickly too. They speak the same language, and it is up to us to LISTEN, not participate (except perhaps to encourage or validate) and wait to hear what they have to say. I am still learning – I hope I never stop – and I think it is up to all of us to make it our business to be aware of everything that is out there. Not to step into those worlds necessarily – young adults and new adults don't tend to respond well to us oldies stepping on and messing up their online turf – but to observe, to include it in our thinking about services and resources for teens. Because if we don't

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we get erased out of the picture; they will move on and find something else. The trick will be to make a connection and keep it open.

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