

Just what message are we sending?



Mark Pavilons

It's pretty easy for us humans to describe one another.

But if you've ever had to describe yourself, it's quite another matter. For some reason, many people find it difficult or uncomfortable talking about themselves and would rather engage in water-cooler conversations.

But it's been the role of artists, writer, scholars and religious students to document and transcribe historic events. We rely on such documents to describe our living history on this planet.

Human beings have only been on the planet for a fraction of the Earth's 4 billion years of existence.

Current estimates put the age of the universe at just shy of 14 billion years. The Earth is estimated at 4.5 billion years old. Modern man (*homo sapiens sapiens*) have only been around for a small fraction of that time - roughly 200,000 years. However, *homo sapien* predecessors have been dated at 2-6 million years.

But we've been curious about the stars and cosmos ever since we began to walk upright and got a better view of the night skies.

Modern man has been almost obsessed by his never-ending appetite for learning the secrets of the universe. Just what place do we puny humans have in the infinity of space?

We have been reaching out for decades.

Space probe Voyager 1 has become the first man-made object to leave our solar system. It's on a journey away from our family of planets, heading out into unexplored space, and it's still in contact with us here on Earth.

Scientists tell us it's more than 11 billion miles from the sun, entering inter-stellar space.

Voyager 1 and sister probe Voyager 2 were launched in 1977 to explore the outer planets.

Voyager 2 is behind its sister - heading out of the solar system.

Each craft carries a gold-plated audio-visual disc for the benefit of any intelligent extraterrestrials who might be flying by.

The discs carry photos of the Earth and its human inhabitants, a range of scientific information, spoken greetings from key people, a medley, "Sounds of Earth," that includes the sounds of whales, a baby crying, waves breaking on a shore, and a variety of music.

There are musical works by Mozart and blues and spiritual singer Blind Willie Johnson.

I'm not sure who was in charge of picking the music prior to the probes' launch, but popular tunes in 1977 included We Will Rock You by Queen; Paradise by the Dashboard Light by Meat Loaf; Dust in the Wind by Kansas or Come Sail Away by Styx. And what about the "king" - Elvis? If anyone could be a goodwill ambassador for Earth, Elvis would be the one!

Voyager 1's power supply will run out in roughly 15 years.

So, if we do have some cosmic cousins out there, hopefully they'll intercept our note and read all about us, if they're not already watching us from afar.

If they are currently monitoring our TV broadcasts, we're in big trouble. From infomercials and YouTube to reality shows, humankind is currently kind of messed up, so it's unlikely our superior brethren will pay us a visit any time soon.

So, the experts at NASA had to capsule humanity with some data and a few ditties. Not an easy task to be sure.

It begs the question: what would you put in a cosmic picnic basket that best represents our world?

Here are my suggestions. One would be a DVD player and DVD filled with a multitude of images and videos that capture all

aspects of our planet. My DVD would contain aerial photography of the wonders of the world, Olympic highlights, some overtime Maple Leafs' clips and current rock concerts. Some images of big, nasty creatures like great white sharks and whales would be a good idea, too. I'd toss in a few images of our technological prowess ? modern jet fighters, iPads and shuttle missions. A couple of snapshots of Schwarzenegger and Stallone in their prime might be recommended. We don't want to appear weak!

I'd include some snack foods, like potato chips, chocolate bars and jelly beans, all in air-tight containers. Maybe a few cans of Chunky Soup or Mr. Noodle would help.

Space permitting, I think it would be a good idea to include fully decked-out male and female mannequins, complete with the latest fashions, jewellery and makeup.

There are so many negative things about the human race, I find it hard to create a sampling of really nice things that epitomize our race. Maybe you'd have better luck.

There's a word of caution in all of this, however.

As any science fiction fan would easily realize, our alien counterparts may not be as nice as we expect. They may be ruthless, violent thugs out to cause mayhem and mass destruction.

Giving them a road map to their newest source of slave labour, natural resources or food, would be ill advised, since we don't really have the means to defend ourselves against a superior foe.

All the Elvis tunes in the world won't save us from the voracious appetite of man-eating space aliens!

Should we leave well enough alone and just keep to our own galactic neighbourhood ??one that we know is safe?

Or should we ?boldly go where no one has gone before??

I?guess we'll find out.