

## The flip side of modern advances

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When humankind disappears from the cosmic landscape, I hope we have left a decent legacy behind.

And I truly hope icons from our past do not include things like those nasty plastic-ring bottle and can holders ? the epitome of human stupidity.

Of course there's progress ? and we have decades of technological prowess to show for it. We have made advancements in almost every aspect of the human condition, from civil rights to medical breakthroughs. We have learned more about this planet and the stars in the past 20 years than ever before in our entire existence, which spans millions of years.

Yes, when we put our collective minds to it, there's nothing we can't accomplish.

Of course, nothing great comes without a price.

And we have paid dearly for our advanced state of living in North America.

While billions of our brethren still do not enjoy fresh water, electricity, indoor plumbing and a proper education, we sit back in our leather recliners, smug in the fact we've made a pretty penny on the backs of others.

But there's much more to it. In the climb up the proverbial ladder, we may have skipped a rung or two along the way.

Ask anyone what has changed in the past 50 years and you'll get a litany of things ??a huge laundry list of advancements. Colour TV, microwaves, cell phones, satellite dishes and airbags. GPS, CDs, Blu-Rays.

Many of us in the 50-ish age bracket will also fondly remember doing without these contrivances and the stresses of the modern world.

Just for nostalgia, here are some neat things that have fallen by the wayside:

Door to door mail delivery; warnings instead of tickets from police officers; dialing a telephone; bunny ears for the TV set; leaving the doors of our homes and cars unlocked; being outside every minute we could and riding bikes; getting dirty and realizing we had to have a bath; being nervous about first dates; asking for a woman's hand in marriage and asking her father first; doing chores; helping our neighbours; real music; respecting our teachers and elders ...

Most of these have nothing to do with technology and how far we've come. One thing that hasn't changed is the fact we're humans, and our fears, frailties and desires haven't changed much since we left the caves. Only our fashion sense has improved, but only somewhat.

By seeking efficiencies, in an attempt to make our lives easier and more comfortable, we strayed, well off the beaten path. There's a reason that old path was beaten ? it took you somewhere!

And here are a few things that impact our lives and our family cohesiveness.

Eating at the dinner table and cleaning up the kitchen together.

In our home, my German-born mother was by far one of the greatest cooks I've ever known. We took home-cooked meals for granted and when friends and co-workers came over for a bite, they were overwhelmed.

We didn't have to be asked to clear the table and put our stuff away.

Just how often does this scenario play out in the average home today?

As a kid, we escaped the confines of our homes and bedrooms every chance we could. We even did chores to earn "points" from our parents, just so we could dash out and run, play, ride and just fool around.

We climbed trees, threw a ball around and watched cars go by, calling out "my car!" Our parents didn't see us for hours on end, but didn't worry or call the cops.

How many kids and teens are glued to their video game systems or communication devices? How many pre-teens have a smart phone? How many teens have flown a kite or still actually ride a bike?

We listened to our teachers and tried our best. We learned to print and then honed our handwriting. Believe it or not, cursive writing will soon go the way of the dinosaur and will no longer be taught in our schools. Why? Simply because kids today use keyboards and other methods to take notes or "write" something down. Can you believe we will soon toss out the pen and paper?

Can you imagine a college graduate who can't sign her or his own name?

And technology, particularly digital photography and graphic design, has given us much to think about. It has created an alternate reality "very little in today's print or electronic media is untouched or natural. People, celebrities, consumer products all appear physically perfect.

How do average people and our young, developing minds, handle this? What message has this created? Who in their right mind would use the term "perfect" to describe any aspect of humankind?

Photography has changed entirely. It's regarded as an art, yet today's methods can turn mediocrity into perfection. I truly believe in having an eye for photography but since it's so easy today, it has watered down the market for truly exceptional photographic works. By 2010, one of the major auto manufacturers promises to have a totally automated car "one that drives itself. If this becomes commonplace in the future, would we still have to get driver's licences? Would this put an end to traffic accidents and needless deaths?

I'm still waiting for news on the cloning of human organs, for transplant purposes. By getting replacement parts right off the shelf, it would extend human life noticeably. It would be far better than dying while waiting for a transplant; suffering due to an overburdened and underfunded health care system.

But be careful what we wish for. A substantially longer life means working well into our 80s; mortgages that will never be paid off; pensions running dry; and an exploding seniors' care industry.

So what we'll have are generations of illiterate, lazy, ill-mannered, non-driving workaholics.

I think I'll go climb a tree.