



The Daily Gleaner

November 27, 2010

A Birthday Reflection and a Look Ahead

Today is my 46th birthday. Not much of a milestone other than I am now closer to 50 than 40. Turning 46 makes me think of the things that were top of mind on my 6th, 16th, 26th, and 36th birthdays, as well as about the future.

But first, a few numbers to ponder. The world population has more than doubled in my lifetime from about 3.3 billion in 1964, to about 7 billion today. Global temperature has increased about 0.5 degrees Celsius in the same amount of time and global oil consumption has more than doubled.

When I was six, my focus was on school and playing with Lego. Man landed on the moon for the first time the year before, the NHL had just expanded from six to twelve teams, and Earth Day was first celebrated. On a black and white television I remember watching Neil Armstrong on the moon. But other than that global event, I didn't really pay attention to issues beyond what my next Lego creation would be, nor should I have, being a child.

Any teenager knows what my focus was at the age of 16: music, sports and girls. World events still did not come onto my radar. Today's youth still focus heavily on their social lives (just check out Facebook), but I have also met many teenagers today who are genuinely concerned about the state of our global environmental and political affairs. On one hand, I am encouraged by their level of knowledge and concern to take action, but on the other hand, it worries me that we have taken the world to a place where we are placing the burden of worry on our youth.

I had just started working on environmental issues when I was 26. I was working on energy efficiency projects and managing projects like cleaning up underground storage tanks leaking oil and old electrical transformers filled with PCBs, it was merely 'my job'. I spent the nineties (26 to 36) mostly in the environmental field, by then it was 'my career'. Then my environmentally focused career morphed into 'my passion' at 36, the year our daughter was born. It was then that I realized that we have to do something to make this a better place for future generations.

So here I am at 46, mid-life if I make it to 92 years old in 2056. So what do the next few decades have in store for us? Global population is projected to increase by about another two billion people, global temperatures will likely go up another one degree, and health care costs over then next three decades will go through the roof as baby boomers experience their aging years.

These trends concern me for a number of reasons. The key one being that there is an incredible financial and environmental burden being placed on today's youth. They are going to have to solve these problems in their working lives, as the older generation enjoys their retirement.

Which gets me to my 56th birthday in 2020. Let's hope us boomers can start making a difference over the next decade so when we turn over the keys of leadership to younger generations they will have a

good running start compared to today. Then perhaps when I turn 66, I can again focus on golf and Lego, the things that amused me decades ago.

Will we have our global environmental issues in hand by then? Will we be fully committed and acting on setting our carbon trajectory downward versus upward, and seeing the results of that action? Will we be adapting smartly, sustainably and healthily to the 'new world' climate change brings us? These questions I cannot answer at present, but I do know that we have all the knowledge and information we need right here and now to be able to answer these questions affirmatively in 20 years. Now, collectively, we just need to use it.

Peter Corbyn is Special Advisor to The Climate Project Canada and co-founder of GreenNexus.com.