



The Daily Gleaner

October 3, 2009

An Age to Avoid

First there was the prehistoric age. Then came the stone, copper and iron ages. So what will the historians of tomorrow call our current age?

I hope it's wrong, but a recently released movie suggests that the age our generation is presiding over will bear an unflattering name: the Age of Stupid.

"The Age of Stupid" has been making waves since its debut in the UK in March, and since premiering around the world September 21 and 22. The film is set in the future, 46 years from now. But in the movie, the world of 2055 bears little resemblance to the world of today. It's a bleak, sparsely populated place, ravaged by the chaos and consequences of climate change and resource depletion.

Its main character is an old man despairing about how the people of the early 21st century had to have been aware of the causes and consequences of climate change, yet chose to do nothing.

It's true that it's just a movie, and it's true that it features some pretty extreme examples of the consequences of climate disruption. An ice-free Matterhorn, Las Vegas reverting to desert and the flooding of London's waterfront and are shocking to contemplate. In the real world, few expect anything that extreme to occur by 2055 – but the global scientific community has long warned that such consequences are within the realm of long term possibility.

Being remembered as stupid might not sit well with us, and it shouldn't. We are, after all, the intelligent species. Yet some basic and troubling facts might be cause for rethinking that bold and confident label.

For example, globally, we're burning more fossil fuels than ever, thus producing more emissions than ever. We're cutting more forests, fishing more fish and using more water, stretching the limits of a planet that cannot expand in proportion to our demands upon it.

It's true that we're not stupid. But if actions speak louder than words, it's clear that we have an incredible capacity for ignoring what middle school math tells us is an unsustainable combination.

Unfortunately, you don't have to look too far to see examples of things we do that might baffle future generations looking for intelligence in their pedigrees. I can just see them shaking their heads incredulously:

"There actually was something called a Hummer?"

"People drank water that was shipped hundreds of kilometres in plastic bottles, when tested, pure water was available from their taps?"

“Fresh strawberries in January?”

“Drive-throughs, just to avoid walking a few steps?”

Even if the movie does take some theatrical liberties, its core message is worth pondering. How can we as a species be so intelligent and creative in some areas, yet so ignorant and unseeing in others? We snicker about ostriches sticking their heads in the sand to avoid threats (an urban myth), yet we are so immersed in our own lifestyles that we fail to see the future we are creating for those we love most, our kids.

It doesn't have to be that way. Today, we possess all the tools, technology and resources we need to solve our climate crisis. We're missing just two things: commitment and action, on the parts of individuals and governments the world over.

But are we up for the challenge? It's about much more than recycling the newspaper or changing a light bulb; it's about transforming the way we live, travel, work and produce energy. It's about sustainability as the underpinning for all we do.

Are we up for it? I hope so. Together, we can rewrite the script. Together, we can make “The Age of Stupid” a footnote of cinematic folklore. Together, we can make our kids and grandkids marvel and wonder instead at another age – the Age of Smart.

“The Age of Stupid” will be screened 6:30 PM Wednesday, October 7 at Empire Theatres, Regent Mall, Fredericton. To attend, please call the NB Lung Association at 506 455 8961, extension 113, or e-mail eddie.oldfield@nb.lung.ca. To host a screening of “The Age of Stupid” in your community, call Debbie Rains at Criterion Films at 1 800 565 1996, extension 260.

Carl Duivenvoorden, this week's Green Matters guest columnist, is a speaker, writer and green consultant living in Upper Kingsclear. Check out www.changeyourcorner.com for more information.