

Is 'easy' really what our species needs?

by MARK PAVILONS

I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life. I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.

- Theodore Roosevelt

We are living in fast-paced times. We're desperately trying to catch up to our always-expanding technology, but we have to wonder to what end.

Our world, and our species, have seen more wonders, more advancements in the last 100 years than in all of our hundreds of thousands of years on this planet. In what can be seen as the blink of an eye, we've gone from horse and buggy to rides in space. We've gone from dying young to living long. We've switched from back-breaking work to modern luxury.

I doubt there are many people in this country who don't have a ton of gadgets - from garage door openers and smart phones, to electric vehicles and smart appliances.

Just a generation ago from yours truly, my parents had emerged from a horrible world war. Dusting themselves off as youngsters, they came to Canada in search of a life, any life.

They worked hard, learned the language, worked for low wages and lived frugally. They didn't have cell phones, and often didn't even have a dime for a pay phone. They had no idea about fax machines, credit cards or online shopping. They wasted nothing and were realistic in their expectations.

Like many immigrants, they managed to carve out a decent life - not an extravagant one, but a good one.

They had no one to rely on and never expected hand-outs or donations. They worked for every penny, every step forward. They saved and were cautious with their money. They lived in an era of essentials, with a dash of social interaction from time to time.

Even as I grew as a youngster (the last of the Boomers), I was blessed, even spoiled. I really never longed for anything that my parents couldn't provide. I had a strong foundation, learned values and ethics. I'm not really sure where my humour, wit and curiosity came from. My charm, well that took years of practice to perfect!

Most subsequent generations - the Xs, Ys and Zs - have had it similarly easy. Sure, we all fall on hard times and have to work to meet unexpected challenges and turmoil. The past 18 months is a huge case in point.

But our young people today aren't plagued by well, the plague, rotting teeth, polio, malnutrition or (largely) homelessness. Most parents are more than happy to offer extended stays in the basement (once considered a joke or criticism). Most parents help with cars, car payments and car insurance.

Most parents offer their services as taxi drivers, Uber Eats delivery people and cleaning crews.

Heck, at the touch of a screen, food can be delivered within an hour. Online shopping is fast and easy, with packages arriving on our doorstep the next day.

Sadly, we don't have to leave our homes for most necessities today.

Sure, it's easy and simple, but is that what God intended for us? Is this way of life part of the grand 'land of milk and honey'?

I'm not sure.

Granted, technology has provided some wonderful benefits, not the least of which is improvements to health, medicine and non-invasive surgeries.

Our kitchen gadgets are insanely 'smart,' to the point where cooking is no longer a chore. I came across a 'smart cooker' recently (all-in-one pressure cooker) that can be accessed and monitored from your phone. We have robot vacuums and robot lawn mowers.

Our home entertainment offers a multitude of streaming services, movies, shows and experiences of all shapes and sizes. We could 'camp out' on our sofas for days, as long as Skip the Dishes keeps coming!

I'm forever thankful for map features on my phone, helping me to find locations across the province. I don't know how we did without them! Well, I do, and can not-so-fondly remember the unfoldable folding maps.

I enjoy having smart air purifiers in my home, for the health of my family members.

I rely on the Internet for a great many things, not the least of which are how-to videos and family recipes.

I enjoy the speed and miracles of receiving news and information from around the world, on an hourly basis.

And yet in all of this technological splendour, we're moody, grumpy, depressed, even sick.

I wonder if 'easy' is what we need.

Many of us Boomers often call for a return to simpler things, a less complicated way of life.

That's not to suggest we abandon all modern conveniences. We can live in harmony with technology, as long as we don't become too reliant, too soft, too mentally blob-like.

Leonardo da Vinci, the creator of many advanced gizmos, once said that 'simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.'

Steve Jobs said: 'Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.'

If you haven't tried it lately, cooking over a camp fire is just marvellous.

Or, like Forrest Gump, if you feel like running 'well, just run.

We humans, in an effort to escape from our hectic, fast-paced urban lives, retreat to the woods, lakes, rivers and farms. It's there we find the ultimate in simplicity.

I'm reminded of another sentiment that nature doesn't hurry along, and yet everything gets done. Our fellow citizens are now calling for device-free days and going 'off the grid.' It's all in an attempt to get back to basics and just enjoy what's all around us.

'Voluntary simplicity means going fewer places in one day rather than more, seeing less so I can see more, doing less so I can do more, acquiring less so I can have more,' said Jon Katat-Zinn.