

Where Have All the Flowers Gone ... Again?

By Patricia M. Mahon



In terms of the geologic scale, we find ourselves in the Cenozoic period which began 65 million years ago. It is also known as the Age of the Mammals. In terms of human progression, we are living in the Information Age. It is also known as the Age of Globalization.

The Cenozoic period is one characterized by the proliferation of land animals, birds, and flora. Flowering plants have dominated our place in geo-chronologic history. The Age of Globalization is characterized by integration, interaction, and interconnectivity. Distraction and disruption has defined our place in human history.

So we have gone from living in a “world” to inhabiting a “globe.” Everything is global now. I can’t help but think about those metal globes from grade school that I would spin and spin until the teacher told me to stop. I never quite understood all the colors and shapes, why it was round and how one would travel the world upside down. Yes, yes ... I was eventually lectured on centripetal force and gravity. Regardless, I felt quite redeemed when I learned that Columbus did not understand these concepts either. I imagine that GPS, our Global Positioning System would leave him completely dumbfounded.

If we stop to consider our technological progression, it is enough to leave all of us dumbfounded. We have created talking machines, computing machines, cellular networks, information networks, social networks, software, hardware, wireless connections, satellites, smart phones, smart watches, artificial intelligence, robots, drones, cloud infrastructure, nano-architecture and 3-D imaging.

Have you been paying attention? The answer is likely no. Our attention span has collapsed along with the amount of time it now takes to circumnavigate the earth. Columbus sailed from Spain to the Bahamas in 10 weeks. A non-supersonic aircraft recently circled the 26,000 mile circumference of the globe in a little under two days. Now there is talk of building hypersonic machines that travel at five times the speed of sound that could take us around the world in six hours.

I’m not sure I want to see the world in six hours. That gives me just 51 minutes at each of the 7 classic wonders of the world ... the Temple of Artemis – *whoosh*, The Great Pyramid of Giza – *whoosh*, The Hanging Gardens of Babylon – *whoosh*, The Statue of Zeus at Olympia – *whoosh*. Imagine what that would do to tourism!

There is something to be said for contemplation --- isn’t there? We can now text faster than we can talk and post faster than we can think and take a selfie faster than we can say “virtual cheese.” Am I the only one that is worried about this?

For all its merits, technology has clearly taken some things away ... face-time, focus, intimacy, introspection, and eye-to-eye contact at the dinner table. I'll be the first to admit that I cannot find my way anywhere without navigation. I cheat at trivia games with my phone, and without Wikipedia, I would be a certified dunce. And when Siri, Watson and Pepper all start beating me at chess, I need a life hack.

It's clear that Google has become the unsung hero of what is left of our gray matter. We are the test pigeons of neurotransmission and action potential chomping the "Everlasting GobStopper" of digital junk. I don't feel good about any of this, mind you. I long for nostalgia, and I do believe that in so many ways we have lost our innocence.

I will spare everyone the "it was better back then" speech. I am not my parents, but I am astonished by what the world has become. My Mom and Dad hung around just long enough to tell me that everything was going to be fine but not long enough to teach me what to do when it isn't. There is so much wrong with humankind that I find myself formulating questions to ask them, if ever I see them again.

We've reached a place where a lot of things matter to us but what is perhaps more important is what does not matter to us ... grace, manners, humility, compassion, and each other. The automation that was meant to advance us is now slowly taking us down. The networks that were meant to connect us are now slowly dragging us apart. The ease of information that was designed to edify us is leaving us more unenlightened than ever. I ask you, what does someone sitting in a café, a subway, an airport or a theatre have to do with anyone's political cause?

Perhaps I am reading too much into things, but it has been a while since I've thought about flowers. They are the blooms and blossoms that characterizes our age and the perfect metaphor for beauty, spring and renewal. Still, I can't help thinking that we'll post them, tweet them, pin them and share them ... but never actually smell them. Silly us. When will we ever learn?