

Earth Day I: "Indifference a Threat to Our Existence"

By Garry Bowen

In the last few years, I have had the chance to review to what Earth Day has meant since it began. In 1970, I went to the first Earth Day festivities, after leaving my hometown of South Lake Tahoe, notably during the humongous winter of 1968-69.

In 2000, while during some work in the early spring again in Denver at the Department of Energy (actually next door in Golden), I reflected on where we had come as a society in terms of sustaining our way of life, and where this direction had led us. The Beatles lyrics quoted above show how prescient they really were, as they were written before the introduction of the seminal book that started Earth Day, "Silent Spring".

Rachel Carson, the book's author, was once quoted as saying "we can no longer afford to alienate the source of our power", which is the essence of what she discovered through her writings, and provided the impetus for the creation of the EPA, Clean Water Act, and National Environmental Act. She is also quoted as saying, "In an age where man has forgotten his origins and is blind to even to his most essential needs for survival" he has become "the victim of his own indifference."

So, the indifference we acknowledge while being at the mercy of various bureaucratic and regulatory agency impositions that are supposedly guiding us in the right direction, all too often leaves a lot to be desired. Arthur C. Clarke once said, "I don't have all the answers, which just means that the questions need to be more meaningful."

In particular, as we are experiencing so many cultural eye-openers, and in the recent past, the right questions are beginning to be asked.

Let me pose one:

What is the difference between environmentalism and sustainability?

Simply put, environmentalists find causes to be "against", like the agency actions they usually confront, while sustainability is more about taking that same cause, finding solutions and bringing them top reality.

So, once the citizenry can inform themselves enough on what an issue really is, versus what one side declares it to be, then most of the concerns are rendered irrelevant, absent a focus on the only real question: Does it fit in with the way the world really works?

Granted, this may require further orientation into what a framework of sustainability is, but the best of them is tied to the laws of thermodynamics (making it science-based, for those out there who won't venture a decision unless it is).

Simply put, the world's natural and generative capacity is the standard against which human behavior (and impact) is weighed, relieving "experts" from trying to set limits based on incomplete science or policy. As the citizenry learns to claim this process as their own, they also learn to live within nature's limits, a process which is amazingly positive, exciting and resonant.

So, as we once again celebrate Earth Day, rest assured that there is light; that we are beginning to understand that life may actually be easier to live with eyes open, with better understanding of what you see – (and that) it'll all work out, cause it matters much to you, to all of us.

Remember, the opposite of love is not hate – it's indifference. Or, As Pogo once said, "We have seen the enemy, and it is us..."

It still is. But, we have learned a lot. And still can.