Secretly Yearning for an Outbreak to Happen

Shôn Ellerton, March 25, 2020
It's easy to vilify the youth with irresponsible behaviour during an outbreak, but let's look at it from their perspective.

RELEASE VIRUS?

YES or **NO**

This may seem cold and heartless, but if someone offered me, 25 to 30 years ago, that I had the choice of pressing a button that said, 'PRESS HERE TO RELEASE COVID-19, I might have possibly done so. As I contemplate this thought, I now shudder at the very prospect of having done so; now having aged parents, a loving wife and son, and assets that I've built up over my lifetime.

I'm initiating this topic on the back of some of the social media backlash and disgust centred on the youth flouting the recommended conditions of adhering to social distancing and refraining from hedonistic social jollies like getting together with mates and having a good time. Such an example emerged from an [article](#) by the Daily Mail (admittedly, a paper of not particularly high repute) of Spring Breakers in Miami 'selfishly' not caring about the seriousness of the coronavirus and enjoying themselves partying and drinking. Social media tweeting, for example, from a highly opinionated [Piers Morgan](#) expressing his disgust at what the youth has come to these days, only injects fuel into an unnecessary fire.

Many of us who have hit their more mature years of adulthood may have adopted the role of being a parent, grown to have aged parents who need a bit of help, have hit it off with a promising career, purchased their first property, tried

their hand in the stock market, and, in general, accumulated stuff, much of which, is probably unnecessary. In short, unless one adopts the minimalistic living or [simple living lifestyle](#), we become further tied to what happens around us as we accumulate and get older. We become more dependent, and more frightened when events such as the outbreak of COVID-19 (aka Coronavirus) hits us. Not being bombarded by media, those living in the street or adopting the hermit lifestyle in the middle of nowhere are more concerned about day-to-day regular living rather than viral outbreaks to be frank.

But what about the youth of, say, those around their early 20s to mid-30s? They may have a completely different mindset to those of us in our middle or senior ages. Before I advance any further, I need to inject the disclaimer that there are always exceptions to the rule; notably that not everyone has their 'bloom' time at the same stage of their biological ages. I, myself, am a relatively late bloomer in this respect.

Returning to the question of whether I would press that button, it's highly possible that I might have done so, particularly a virus which has a much greater chance of hitting the old rather than the young. Everyone is different depending on their circumstances and it's quite important to think hard and cast your mind back to those earlier days.

I was fresh out of university, had a couple of low-paying engineering jobs while others who chose to join the business and finance subjects joined lucratively high-paying careers from the likes of UBS, Goldman Sachs and other financial institutions pushing little bits of paper around and mastering the use of financial instruments to manipulate the money market, none of which I knew any about at the time. I had the mindset of a young disillusioned engineer who had the 'keys' of building a world with better bridges, water sanitation facilities, railways, building and roads, and yet being frustrated as my financier friends from the same university were enjoying high-brow cocktail parties, being invited to yachting events, slapping down big deposits on their first townhouses while I lived day to day paying off my rent to live in a grotty one-bed unit on a noisy street in a market town in the middle of Kent (England). In the grand scheme of things, looking back on it all, I am very lucky and grateful for how things turned out and how much worse I could have been off, but sometimes we think quite differently when we're younger. Keeping up with your peers and friends, as illogical as it sounds, is a natural phenomenon.

Until making that momentous decision to get into telcos and IT when a golden opportunity arrived working for T-Mobile, a major mobile phone carrier, things were not looking particularly great *in relative terms* to my peers and friends. My friends started to have families and buy houses; renting in the UK, or at least in my circle of who I knew, seemed to be considered a sign of failure. As mentioned above, I was struggling to pay the rent while house prices took an astronomical trajectory upwards. I was at the UK during this time, when the '*haves*' and the '*have nots*' were the butt of many a conversation concerning those who have property and those that do not. I remember, as do many others, the influx of rich overseas investors snapping up property, particularly the Russian glut of money buying up huge swathes of the London property market. Council taxes were capped at relatively low property ceilings while the much-hated Poll Tax did irreparable damage to the credibility of trust between the lower to middle classes of the public and the UK government. Even during my 20s, I was not naïve to the fact that the UK was throwing away its in-house manufacturing ability and further relying on centring itself as a financial stage prop. I remember thinking about the situation about what would happen if Britain just didn't make anything anymore and just relied on financial services and tourism. During that time, I felt like a failure and was feeling, generally, left behind and demoralised. Jeremy Clarkson once said that the failures of Britain eventually move to Australia. And that's just what I did!

From a far earlier age (perhaps 10), I remember the fear I felt when perusing through my German grandfather's world atlas, studying the page with the steep exponential curve of the graph depicting how the global population has risen so much year after year. It was 4 billion at the time and I remember that, unless something happens, we're going to hit 8 billion when I'm an adult. I was half-confident that the worst of the worst could happen, and that was, of course, nuclear apocalypse from man's extraordinary ability to seemingly wish to annihilate each other for the sake of power. I was appalled (and still am) that so-called developing countries in Africa yield such incredibly high population rates creating vast armies of suffering starving children being left out to rot while being surrounded by disease-ridden flies while those nations that *can* afford more offspring are declining in population. As the late and venerable comedian Dave Allen once said, 'If we continue this way for another twenty years, there'll be standing room only', to inject any light-heartedness into this topic.

I'm perhaps less frightened of the increase of the world's population now but then, I was of the mindset that either the population needs to be greatly reduced or, perhaps, just enjoy it while you can, while things are 'good'. I certainly had no plans on bringing any children into the world. What would they get? A world full of contaminants, diseases, and the possibility that some whacko from the terrorist community or rogue government managed to launch a nuke bringing the possibility of an all-out world nuclear apocalypse as portrayed by that most disturbing of fictional documentary-style films, *Threads*, or that book, *On The Beach* by Nevil Shute?

I was, and still am, of the belief that 'Mother Nature' has that extraordinary ability to 'make corrections' when balances are thrown out of kilter due to extreme events, natural or otherwise. One could associate this with James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis which stipulates that living organisms interact with the Earth to regulate conditions suitable for life, and if this means eradicating a single rogue species (e.g. *Homo Sapiens*) posing a global threat, so be it. I remember a novel (also a great movie) by Michael Crichton called the Andromeda Strain about an unknown virus that wiped out a small remote town in the American West. Two surviving patients (an old man and a baby) were isolated and contained in an underground bunker complete with a nuclear self-destruct device should the virus get out of control. A team of scientists and experts worked around the clock looking for a vaccine. The key to detonating the establishment (if instructed to do so) was given to the unmarried younger male who most fit the profile of making a very difficult decision during a crisis. Crichton gave it the name of the Odd-Man Hypothesis. Riveting stuff.

Some of the more extreme environmentalists or some of those members belonging to organisations like the Zero Population movement or other more extreme movements, often advocate the need to purposely wipe out some of the population for the survival of the world. Furthermore, there are also those scary die-hard misanthropists who believe that mankind has no place on Earth and would press the 'kill' switch at the drop of a hat. For those into James Bond, remember the 1979 movie, Moonraker, the one where magnate Drax has an evil plan to wipe out humans from the world by releasing deadly toxin (which, incidentally, only affects humans) by launching pods containing vials of it from his space station in orbit around the Earth? After which he intends to repopulate the world with fit, healthy and young adults (a modern-day Noah's Ark) who were shipped up in rockets beforehand to be housed within the safe confines of

the space station while the deadly onslaught would take place, if it wasn't for James Bond to the rescue of course! I remember watching that film as a kid, and I was thinking, that ain't a half bad idea! The fictional Drax was a character who thought with that type of kid-like ruthless pragmatism, cruel as it may be. What was chilling about it all was the fact that Drax was so wealthy that, as scripted in the film, 'if he doesn't want it, he doesn't have it' implying that moving on to 'play God' was the only thing left to satisfy his needs.

Back to reality, like many who start out in the professional world, we start out with little in the way of assets. We start out on the lower rung and struggle enormously to obtain a footing on the property ladder, let alone even thinking about starting a family in which to support. The older generation often scoff at the younger generation that they are expecting too much, harping on how much more difficult it was in their generation. I don't necessarily buy into that argument because, it is indeed, very difficult for young professionals to lead a lifestyle that their parents or grandparents may have led. For example, house prices in cities like London, Sydney or San Francisco are inaccessible to all but for the very few in our ever-widening wealth gap in our society. Gone are the days of the 3 times average annual income to buy a house. For those that have less to lose, particularly from those that struggle to get by each day having to pay huge chunks of their pay check into rent, it is, frankly, of no surprise that the prospect of unleashing a virus to reduce the population and cool the economy is a fresh window of opportunity which, for others, might spell doom. On the flipside, it could do *worse* but, much like the election of Trump, it is, nevertheless, a *change* which might prove positive; a gamble possibly worth taking.

These days, being firmly seated in middle age, the thought of a virus going amok is quite frightening. Our friends and family could be affected. Our livelihoods due to the possibility of a financial depression could be at stake. The death count from COVID-19 is still far lower than other well-known diseases and man-made events such as car accidents and suicides, but we have that innate fear of the unknown. The youth, in general, do not or, at least, have far less fear of danger. For example, I used to climb up cliff faces without ropes and climb snowy mountains in the middle of winter in the more remote areas of Colorado by myself as a teenager with a real possibility of never returning home. I used to enjoy riding my motorcycle at breakneck speed down little country lanes lined with hedgerows in the English countryside. To take it

further, I remember hearing stories from those who were kids during World War II saying it wasn't so bad, but rather remembering that it was a great big adventure! We all know that the young are more likely to take risks and be more oblivious to danger.

My point is this. We often fail to visualise situations from other perspectives. Social media has been rife with discrediting the young (say, from late teens to late twenties) as being morally irresponsible, selfish, stupid and oblivious to events surrounding them. This is gross stereotyping and unfair. Sure, many of us develop wisdom when we age; however, we sometimes lose the edge of making very difficult decisions that are necessary for the greater good. I remember a truly awful hypothetical question which could have been asked of me should I pursued an ambition I once had to get into the United States Air Force Academy during my high school years. The question was this. If you, as a pilot in a jet, were asked to launch a missile at a town infected by a fatal outbreak but if your family was in that town, would you launch it? I also remember my answer at that time. I could not. Which is nice to know. But would all others, should they have been given that question, answer in the same way?

Many of us also manifest feelings of disdain, or even disgust, towards the younger set who may see or do things in a very different light which contravenes what we might consider wholesome practice. When I was in my early twenties, I might have pressed the button to release something like COVID-19 *if* I knew that the chance of surviving is good and for the rest of my family. I certainly wouldn't want to push the nuclear bomb button because *nobody* would have a chance. Neither would I want to release smallpox or ebola as these viruses are truly horrible and indiscriminate as to who it affects. The overall conditions were aligning all together to make that, potentially, horrible decision to press that button. My parents were younger and healthier so they would have a very good chance of survival. My grandparents were getting old and frail, some being bedridden and in pain. I was single and had no dependencies. The economy was over-heating and I felt I kept 'missing the boat'. I believed, and still believe, we are overpopulated, and that, if something could be done, then it should it be done. I'm certain that many of today's youth are feeling the same way as I once did.

As we get older, we grow our network of dependencies. We gain more experience throughout the rich textile of life. We gain more knowledge about who we are and our past and histories. We develop empathy and compassion for others. Well, some of us, that is! We change our perspective of how we live when our friends start to die off from either natural or unnatural causes. For the younger of us, it may be a different story because they may not have attained those levels of wisdom and experience. Before we start demonising the young for their, what we consider, inappropriate actions, it may be worthwhile to cast oneself back to younger years to get a fresh perspective before we force our values on them.