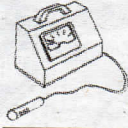


GEIGER Counter



by Matt Geiger, Editor



Future you

Sometimes, you have to be mean to your kid. You have to say “no.” You have to tell them they are wrong. What they want and what they need are not always the same thing, and it’s your job, as their temporary caretaker, to provide for all their needs and only some of their desires.

Whenever my daughter asks why I am bullying her in this way, for that is how children see any parenting that doesn’t involve ice cream, I always say that I am being hard on Hadley right now because I do not only love the current version of her. I DO love the little girl standing in front of me in this moment, but I also love the teenager, and later the woman, she will become. I love her eternally, not only for a second or an hour or a day. And if you give someone everything they ever want, and never what they

need, you are only caring for the them who is happy right now, while you are neglecting the well-being of the person they will become.

“Why can’t I stay up all night?” she asks.

“Because I love *tomorrow* you,” I answer.

“Why do I have to learn how to do all these things for myself?” she says during a lesson.

“Because I love the you who will walk the Earth when you are grown up and I’m dead,” I say. “That’s how much I love you. Forever.”

The short answer to this question, no matter the particulars in which it is asked of me, is that I love future Hadley just as much as I adore the current one, and if I raised her to be helpless or self-pitying or miserable or entitled, I would be harming someone who means the entire world to me.

Speaking of the world, extreme global poverty is at its lowest point in history, according to new United Nations estimates. So is child mortality. A baby born today

has a greater chance than any child ever of growing to see adulthood. Polio, which used to cause so much irreversible paralysis and death, is nearing complete eradication. Oh, and nearly anyone, anywhere can access the complete works of Shakespeare, and every other piece of art ever created, in which all meaning is held to the light, 24 hours per day.

I mostly didn’t see social or corporate media over the holidays as I spent time with my loved ones. When I did tune back in, I was reminded that good news, even when it’s true, is not profitable for the large companies whose algorithms determine what most people see and what most people therefore feel. Heartache, tribalism and outrage are far easier ways to make a buck. And so, the chorus at the end of 2023 and the start of 2024 was, as usual, “Last year sucked and we all hope next year sucks slightly less. We are doomed and profoundly unlucky to be here. Here is my personal top 10 list of ways the world has not catered to my every whim!”

I would strongly suggest to anyone who thinks they are special and unfortunate enough to live in “the worst time ever” to put down your phone and pick up any actual history book. The most unfortunate soul in 2024 has

comfort and entertainment and scientific knowledge that no queen, king, jarl or emperor ever knew.

But most of us are convinced that we are special, and believing we live in the End of Times is an easy, lazy, unfalsifiable way to pretend we matter more than all the other people who came before, and the billions that will follow.

The truth is, there are really three options when it comes to a worldview. The first is to believe that the world despises people. The second, is to think that it loves them. The third, is to believe that it does not care one way or another about us; that we are not important enough to draw its attention.

We live in a time of profound egomania, an era when people think that if anyone they don’t like gets elected it is an intentional cosmic attack on them personally, that you can’t enjoy a sandwich unless someone you like is in the White House, so the first idea – that the world is cruel – is the most popular, at least online, among about half the people all the time. But terrible things are not happening more today than they were 100 years ago. They are just more visible, and they are more visible because they are actually happening less. Bad things are incredibly obvious to

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Mount Horeb (Wis)
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us simply because they are far less frequent than good things. They are rare. The more rare a thing gets, the more clearly we see it. The more it sticks in our eyes. If you saw a pterodactyl gliding over the roof of your house, you would notice it, and you would remember it forever, specifically because it is rare. But if you saw a robin, you probably wouldn't notice it, or would at least forget it soon after it was gone. You probably wouldn't even mention it to anyone else. We are programmed to clearly see things that are abnormal, and that is why, despite the fact that all the data shows we live in the best, safest time in human history, that we live nearly twice as long as our great grandparents, that most people are increasingly obsessed with the suffering that does still occur. We have cures and treatments for most of the diseases that used to be death sentences. (If you love someone with diabetes, and you probably do, remember that this is the only point in human history in which they get to be alive.) But we see the bad because we are supposed to see it. Because if you were walking around 50,000 years ago and you saw a lion near the watering hole, noticing it was the best way to avoid getting eaten.

Telling your friends about it was a good way to help them not get eaten, too.

> The second possibility, that the world actively feels some affection for us, is espoused by a few people. I see some evidence for this, but I suspect it is simply a product of my human urge to feel like I'm the center of the universe. It's something I want to believe, but I'm not sure I really do.

> The third, and final theory is that the world does not care, one way or another, about us. We haven't lived here in this universe very long, and the universe will be here long after we are gone. The cosmos is likely completely indifferent to us. It probably hasn't noticed us yet. It does not love us, nor does it hate us. It doesn't owe us anything. But its apathy is a profound gift. Because, one thing we forget when we are being too self-centered, is that we ARE the universe. We ARE creation. We aren't all of it, but we are part of it. We are not outside of it; we are in it, and it is in us. Each, and every one of us. Anything we do, the universe does. It is up to us to love ourselves or hate ourselves. It is up to us to love one other or hate one another. It is up to us to care for us, today, tomorrow, and as far into the future as our minds can imagine.