

I just met my latest grandchild, Taryn Brooke. As I gazed upon her perfect face and all seven pounds and one ounce of her, with wonder and awe, I suppose I said the same prayer of thanks that all new parents and grandparents say. I would hear myself saying, "So little; so little and so precious." As I watched her stretch and yawn, I would wonder what kind of world it is that she has entered. I know that in so many ways, it is a better world, despite the cynicism often expressed by others. There have always been difficult times and difficult decisions. That is part of the human condition. As we gain in knowledge, though, we have had the opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Taryn will benefit from that knowledge.

Taryn will not see children with missing fingers and shortened limbs because their mothers took thalidomide during their pregnancy. Taryn will have fluoride in her diet and will have fewer cavities than her grandmother had as a child. She will have the option of organic fruits and vegetables.

She will be told stories of her house and neighborhood that will teach her that some things were better before and some things are better now. She lives in an old neighborhood in Connecticut in a little bungalow built in the early 1900's. All the backyards have a grape arbor from the days when everyone made wine and jam. There is a little shed that is built entirely from wooden doors because people were thrifty. There is an outdoor barbecue built of stones brought back from numerous family vacations.

That stone pit burned more than wood and hot dogs, my daughter recently learned from one of the children who grew up in the house. A daughter from the original six children still lives in the neighborhood. She is delighted to be watching a young family inhabit the place and fill it once again with life. She told my daughter, Kate, about the stones and family vacations with the edict, "You can never get rid of that fireplace." It was only recently, though, that this same woman remembered another story of her childhood. She recalled that her mother used to burn just about everything out there, including the family's trash. Well, that was common in those days but the local fire chief thought she was going too far on the day he happened to see and hear fireworks coming out of the fireplace. They weren't really fireworks; they were cans of spray paint. This was probably the equivalent of tossing little rockets with propellant and some lead for good measure, into a fire pit.

So, the fire chief took the tub of an old washing machine, lid and all and put it in the center of the fire pit. He filled the tub with stones, closed the lid and told the woman she could not burn in it any longer. One person took charge and made a difference. He had to. He knew danger when he saw it.

Individual people always did and always will make a difference. It is the need for action and the opportunity for it that needs to be recognized. In a world increasingly inundated with a barrage of facts, options, images and hype and constantly in flux with ever evolving technology, our place and purpose in this world is increasingly difficult to recognize. It is all too easy and, perhaps, a psychological necessity, to forget the reality of numbers, remove oneself from the action and absolve oneself from acting in response to the needs. It is understandable. When overwhelmed: simplify, justify and forget.

There is an artist who helps us to comprehend this perplexing situation. His name is Chris Jordan. He is a photographic artist who helps us all to comprehend the

incomprehensible. He presents large images and panels that might at first glance appear to be abstract art. Upon closer examination, the viewer is stunned to realize that he or she is staring at actual images of thousands or millions of something that is happening all around us. For instance, the photo of two million plastic beverage containers that we in the U.S. discard every five minutes, or the image of one point fourteen million paper bags used in the U.S. every hour.

Sometimes the reality is so large that he is forced to use a substitute. There are the eight million toothpicks representing the number of trees harvested in the U. S. every month to produce office paper.

The artist explains that his “underlying desire is to affirm and sanctify the crucial role of the individual in a society that is increasingly enormous, incomprehensible, and overwhelming.

I am not a big fan of so-called installation art but I think this guy is right on the money. He is right on. Each of us contributes to pollution and each of us can make a difference to reduce it. I hope to be able to see his work in person some day so that I can see the abstract image from a distance and then experience the close-up view of the details. We all need a reality check at times.

Please take part in making this world a better place for my grandchildren and yours. We could use the old “Every Litter Bit Hurts” campaign. That was a good one.

My precious little bit of wonder needs you. Every litter bit hurts and every little bit helps. Pass it on.

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