

A small child faces the heat

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

I heard something the other day that made me start worrying about the old age of my unborn great-grandson.

And I don't mean Social Security or the national debt or the cost of false teeth in the future when the wee ones of today become the elders of tomorrow.

I mean the temperature of the world in which he will be living. I mean the likelihood the alleged Chicken Littles among us are correct that global warming will be reaching its peak by the end of this century.

Normally, those of us in the most selfish generation don't worry our old bald heads and our sagging bosoms about trifles like whatever plagues the world at the end of this century in 2099. That's 86 years from now. Ours is not a generation that is famous for worrying about younger generations. We have our hands full worrying about our own needs - our meds, our capital gains taxes, our Tea Party dues.

The future is not ours to worry about. Let the generations of 2100 tweak whatever ails the Earth in the years beyond our time.

But then word came to me the other day of another blessed event in the family. "It's a boy," said the email from a grandson and his wife.

Actually, it's more like the beginning of a boy. He isn't born yet. While, technically, the bun in the oven is male, that little male won't arrive for a few more weeks.

That seems strange to a person like me who was born before the development of ultrasound, that electronic window into a woman's womb. I'm happy for the lucky couple, but count me among those who still prefer not opening presents until Christmas morning, not being told how a movie ends before I see it and not ruining the traditional birthing-day surprise of whether it's a boy or a girl.

Some of these recent baby customs are a tad strange. For instance, it has become the smarmy practice among giddy couples expecting a baby to announce that "we are pregnant."

Not so. She is pregnant. You, sir, are merely responsible for her condition. Declaring yourself pregnant as a way of signaling your willingness to pitch in and lighten the burdens of her condition makes you admirable, but it distorts the accurate meaning of the word "pregnant."

Granted, you, a well-intentioned hubby, will play your part. You will eagerly help with the housework. You will ignore and forgive any chemically-induced crabbiness. And you will fetch whatever bizarre foods she craves, be they pickles or be they raspberry licorice.

Pregnancy is like the marriage ceremony itself. In both cases, the female of the species is the center of attention. You are no more than a significant part of the supporting cast.

Which brings me back to the question of whether people who will be long dead by the time global warming reaches its peak should concern themselves now with what might happen to billions of people in a far future that we elders will never know.

Many of those little folk who will populate the next century are already among us - for instance, that soon-to-be-born great-grandson of mine. That new member of the family need live only until he is 86 to experience the full unpleasantness of the high heat forecast for the end of this century.

Of course, the odds are quite high that a child born this year will live to be 86. In fact, it is probably safe to say, given the march of modern medicine, most children born today will still be around to experience what we do or don't do now to prevent a nasty new climate.

That fact is not something the elders of today can ignore even if they don't live to see it. People they know and love will be part of it. That next great-grandchild, for instance. If I live to be 86, he will be 11. And he will have the moral right before I check out to look me in the eye and ask why I'm ignoring his future well-being.

So I say to my fellow seniors as we complete our final rotations around the Earth, it is thee and me that the 86-year-olds of the future will curse if we don't get this right. When it comes to the gathering storm of global warming, we are all pregnant.

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