

In Frederik Pohl's dystopian collection of short stories, "The Man Who Ate the World," the act of not consuming was outlawed. It was actually illegal for people not to consume as much as possible. In the first piece, the main character, Sonny Trumie, had become a compulsive, addicted consumer of everything the world had to offer. His childhood consisted of parents who were not as well off as their peers because for a number of reasons they were just not able to consume as much as others. Sonny tried to be a good boy, though, by consuming according to the world's expectations. It became his neurosis.

His first life crisis consisted of his favorite small teddy bear being taken away because a boy of six was expected to consume something larger. As he matured, his life became a frenetic, constant, frantic struggle to eat, build, purpose and repurpose everything he could consume. He used things so quickly and in such volume that he had no time for sleep, he was constantly gorged with food, forever moving, and was mentally burned out in his lifelong attempt to basically consume an entire island city.

In fact, he eventually stressed the natural resources that fed his consumption. A sudden reversal of national policy—rationing of resources—was imposed by the government. The rules changed, but Sonny couldn't. In the end, he had to be told by a therapist in a teddy bear suit that it was no longer necessary to struggle, that compulsive consumption could have an end. She told him what he needed to hear: that he had eaten enough, that he had used enough to win the respect of society, and that his consuming could end. He began to believe her, relaxed, and went without food until morning. He finally slept all night for the first time in 20 years. Close curtain.

This little collection of short stories from 1960 was considered science fiction at the time. I fear it has been more prophetic. Did you know that if your teeth were just one shade whiter, you would be more acceptable to friends and neighbors? Were you aware that society would approve of your children if they had all the latest fall fashions for primary school? It's no revelation that society teaches our kids and us to be consumers, and in general we are pretty good at it.

There is nothing wrong with free markets and advertisements. I like that about our

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND

Creativity Required

See the world, don't just look at it.

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

country. Depending on whom you talk to, up to two-thirds of our domestic economy is driven by consumer spending. However, there is a difference between advertising and insinuating or saying outright that society will shun you if you don't use the right toothpaste or observe the latest fashion trends when you're nine years old.

Somebody somewhere is always talking or writing about making the world a better place, and that's a good idea. But there is something else we should do. My brother

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puts it like this: Yes, we need to make the world better for our children, but we also need to make our children better for the world. Bombarding them with consumerism may not be our best course.

It's also true that we need our kids to be able to think critically, and there has been an awful lot of talk about critical-thinking skills in the world of K-12 education during the past decade. I can personally attest that whatever they are employing is not working. The average college student has changed so much in their college preparedness over time. But there is something else we need to teach our children that has received very little attention. We need our children to be creative thinkers.

Creative thinking is the process we use to develop ideas that are unique, useful, and worthy of elaboration. There is a lot of energy now being focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, and that's good. However, STEM education is not a singular solution. Results from the 2013 National Science Foundation Survey of Doctoral Recipients indicated that

only 58 percent of science-based Ph.D. holders were employed in science occupations, and 35 percent were actually unemployed.

What this means is that we have a surplus of Ph.D. holders in STEM fields. *The Atlantic* published a piece on the National Science Foundation report and found that Ph.D. holders in general have a less-than-50-percent chance of securing a full-time job in their field, and that percentage has been decreasing for about 20 years.

I can bear witness to the fact that the competition for university faculty positions is fierce, from both domestic and foreign applicants. In some cases there may be 400 to 500 applicants competing for a single faculty position. It is certain that as the competition for STEM jobs increases, the applicants who can demonstrate creative abilities will be more successful at obtaining and keeping those positions.

Knowledge without creativity offers us nothing. I regularly remind myself about Dr. Norman Borlaug, 1970 Nobel Prize winner, the man who saved a billion people, the father of the "green revolution." Notice what he did: he created new, higher producing, disease-resistant varieties of wheat. He took what he knew and created something better for the world.

Youngsters need to know a lot of things these days, but they also need the subjects that inherently teach creativity—like music, theater, creative writing, journalism, art, photography, and others. They may not have a career in the arts, but they will need creativity to live. Creativity makes you see the world instead of just look at it.

So now I have a selfish request if you will indulge me. I humbly ask that you figure out ways to be creative in your personal life. Be an example to your kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, etc. Encourage them to be creative and look for ways to make it happen. Creativity is something we are born with; we just somehow forget about it as we become adults. Pablo Picasso once said: "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." ■

Your Wasteland Guide is Barry L. Perryman, who has a Ph.D. in rangeland ecology. He is an educator, researcher, author, speaker and part-time philosopher specializing in natural resource management issues of the western states. He may be contacted at bperryman1296@charter.net.