

You Have Got To Be Kidding

We were driving over by the Oxford Valley Mall, stopped at the light. Next to us, a little bit ahead, was a cream colored Cadillac Escalade with the side window rolled down half way. A child was poking her arm and head out of the window, obviously not strapped into a car seat or seat belt. My teenage daughter was shocked, as was I. What was the driver of the car thinking?

I remember 20 years ago we could not leave the hospital with our new born without a nurse visually checking that we had a car seat ready to go. She actually accompanied us to the curb and looked through the window as we settled our newborn in and tugged on the car seat straps. Car seats and seat belts are such an ingrained part of how we treat our children and ourselves these days, it is actually shocking to see a child standing on the seat looking out the window as the traffic light changed to green.

Why do we feel such a visceral response to a thoughtless driver – one who chose not to use the car seat or one who simply forgot? Why, because we know the consequences to a child in the event of an accident – the consequences to the innocent – are potentially so severe and life altering we as a society demand that adults be responsible. Even when we can not predict the future. Even when we can only imagine that something might happen which leaves a child permanently injured. When we adapt into our lifestyle these safety measures we can not NOT look out for our own children and those in our community. These truths become who we are through conviction and repetition.

So what about other hard to predict events that may seriously effect the wellbeing of our children if we do not take daily action. I am writing of course about climate change and resource depletion. I can not predict the future, but isn't precaution on the side of the environment better than the status quo? Aren't the consequences for our grandchildren who will be living in 2100 and beyond too unpredictably bad for us not to make important life style changes now.

Let's think of the car seat as a metaphor for some simple things like recycling, CFL's, driving slower to save gas, planting native varieties, rain gardens, localvors and the like. These are things that should be, could be second nature to everyone in the culture. The kind of things that when one sees that they are *not* being followed are SHOCKING.

I remember when Lady Bird Johnson had her “Keep America Beautiful” campaign in the 1960’s, Mrs. Reagan had “Just Say No”, and now Mrs. Obama is promoting sensible eating habits. These are standards of the culture now, even if they are not universally followed. Cultural truths for the benefit of us all.

Most of us worry more that our car runs well than whether the planet is healthy. It’s time for that to change. Like the shock that the average person feels about our recalcitrant no-car-seat-parent noted above, let’s look in the environmental mirror at everything we do or take for granted and see if we aren’t shocked by our current status quo. The heart beat of our country is individuals initiating change. Nothing happens until each of us takes personal responsibility. Strap the baby in the car seat and look it the mirror, its time to get going.

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