

Who knows what's next?

By Constance Scrafield

Sitting at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, celebrating its 95 years as the largest indoor agricultural fair in North America, and hosting an important international horse show throughout its 10-day run, it could be a time of reflection about those years.

In many ways, the history of the Royal, as it is simply known, is a microcosm of Canada's history over that time. There is photographic evidence on the walls in the offices, in the antique pictures of ladies in long skirts and men in bulky suits, standing by their horses or cattle. The automobiles pictured are much loved by modern day collectors.

In spite of the rush that so-called science, medicine and technology have dragged us, we have remained pretty well the same sort of a species as we always were until quite recently. However, in the last few decades, it seems that a new breed of person, a new attitude toward life and what it means, is coming into the light.

It is coming as a surprise to businessmen in the landscaping, construction and other companies that require hands on hard work. Says one gentleman of my acquaintance, in the construction business, "If I could find guys that would work, I could make real money but these young guys just want to stand around and still be paid."

It seems that there is a growing apathy for physical engagement on the part of a large number of young people. I observed, with some sadness, a young woman breast-feeding her baby while she browsed on her phone, rather than cuddling and talking to her infant.

"Changing the way we shop - the future of shopping," as another youthful chap told me - he was in the line to audition for the Dragons' Den. "We millennials don't want to make decisions or bother shopping - our refrigerators are going to order our groceries in the future."

Yet and yet. Here at the Royal, a pair of grandparents were in a hurry to watch their young grandson parade his calf around the show ring. The farming tradition runs in their family back five generations and it looks as though their millennials are not shy of hard manual labour.

The entire span of ages, from youth to horse people in their middle years, are involved in riding the many types of equestrian events here: the classical dressage and show jumping, the light and heavy horses pulling the numerous styles of vehicles; rodeo riding with its dash and excitement are still attracting the millennials along with their elder and younger friends, family and associates in the equine world.

The goats, the bunnies, the llamas and so on, keep the love of their owners, regardless of age, too.

For sure, the crush of technology is changing much of how things are done and it is interesting to speculate on the risks humanity is taking by its dedication to intense research and inventiveness on technological advancement.

From ancient times, back to the writings of the Greeks and the Romans, who decried, as every aging generation since does, the rising youngsters and their independent, even strange ways. Indeed, a perusal of history teaches us that there were generations that really did change things, whether the "old guard" was in favour or not.

Still, it is instructive to note two things: that it is the old guard that largely keeps us at war, which is a lot more dangerous and offensive than clever, manipulative refrigerators. Sadly, though, as the youngsters become the old guard, by virtue of replacing them as they die, the temptation of the vast fortunes that war produces seems to suck them in and the harm continues.

Secondly, however much people are being mowed down as they drift across the street with their noses and eyes glued to their phones, however much they sit in restaurants with each other, communicating with people who are not at that table; however obsessively, sleep-deprivingly preoccupied with their cell phones young people - so many people - are, there is certainly a movement afoot pressing for walks in the woods without cell phones, taking time at home away from them to spend that time with the actual people in the house. For the health of relationships and for mental health on all levels. So, a common-sense rebellion amongst even the most ardent of users is boiling, which, as usual, will result in partial adherence and contrary denial.

Let it be said then, in the face of the looming techno-giant, as a prayer or a final demand, if the rise of technology can be diverted from increasing the efficiency of battle to increasing efficient use of energy and the kind of energy we use; can be employed for the benefit of the "every person"; can finally win the battle to save our planet - our home - from our destructiveness, that would truly be a revolution worthy of any generation.