

The Gladness and the Sadness: riding high again, or not so much

So, the long run up has hit the wall. Two thousand eight ended the bull. The bear growled at last. What does this mean for all of us, we wonder. Even with the economy shrinking, we have never before been able to make and buy and use so much stuff. At the holidays I hear parents talk about how much stuff their kids get and how it was different for them. Most of us forget that it is different for us now too. Never before have we had so many computers and phones and gadgets and clothes and shoes and restaurant choices, and houses, and everything else that we buy. And never so much debt that has to be written off. Apparently we binged on our borrowing.



So there is some fear now and less than straight-out gladness in the cornucopia of plenty, the abundance of goodies and experiences that we have made possible for ourselves. It is at one level still a great celebration and whoopee of what is out there to use and buy and do. And while we are grateful and more attentive with all we have, it is also time to know that next door or in an adjoining neighborhood some of our brothers and sisters are struggling.



At another level, it is even an ok time to be sad at the loss of simpler times before the great consumption binge of the '70s, '80s, '90s and into this century, when the abundance of stuff did not get in our way or demand so much attention, when a simple meal with friends was the highlight of the week instead of a reality TV super-episode featuring a new development so shocking "that we won't want to miss it." Oh, please!!

A song-writer performer, friend of mine, Greg Tamblyn (www.gregtamblyn.com), wrote a beautiful song about this sadness:

We are flying high, we are making time

We love corners cut, we don't like lines

All our days are blurred and our nites are filled

There's no time left for standing still



And while I feel this much of the time, I often feel glad for the abundance of my life and the great choices and freedom I have enjoyed this day, this week, this year.

As ever, the writers of the classics have said it. At the beginning of A Tale of Two Cities Dickens tell us “it is the best of times and the worst of times”. So it is now. The polar ice caps melt and we bump off species without even trying, while I enjoy another trip to New York.

Some see that the end of this cheap abundant fun is over. The uncertainty and shifts taking place in ‘08, ‘09, and 2010 seem quite capable of ending an era. The consuming will have to slow considerably as we remember how to save. The crowded world we live in will drive up the price of food and transportation and everything we have gotten used to in our Suburban World of entitled extended materialism. The crunch is upon us to live more sustainably.



Some other prognosticators see abundance around the corner. Sure there are price blips but never before have so many innovations to switch to a sustainable post-carbon economy been running parallel at the same time. The big breakthroughs and the thousands of little breakthroughs will keep the prosperity right on going. Adjustments sure, but sadness over losing choices, surely not.

Gladness and sadness. Sign of the times. Hold onto your seatbelt. I tend to think big adjustments, including some losses, are on the way. I will trade gladness in for sadness any day, and base my gladness, not on lost choices, but on living within natural limits.

