

Stop and Think

by Mike Harris

First let me clear up an understanding. Stupidity, while it seems to be the direct opposite of smart, contains one important ingredient not found in smart, an unreasoning stubbornness. With that out of the way let us proceed.

There is no such thing as a stupid old individual! One does not get old if they are stupid. The only survivors of all creatures are the ones who are not stupid. Nature's rules for the survival of all species are harsh and immutable. Of all creatures on this planet we are dominant. The extinction of larger species is proof that fang and claw are not the prime requisites for survival. Adaptability, not making bad choices and flexibility are more important than size, muscle, and brute strength. Not so much smart, as less stupid, is the answer.

Ever since the beginning of creation the first to fall by the wayside have been the mindless brutes who did not adapt to their habitat and circumstances. Every creature that still exists has survived because of its adaptability.

The dominating human has, until now, done the best job of adapting. He has learned to live under all sorts of climatic conditions, from the frozen north and south to equatorial deserts. His range of adaptability is unequalled by any other creature, whether on land, sea, in the air, even in the atmosphere.

The driving force to be dominant is fueled by an unusual twist in his make-up that I call curiosity. His appetite for wanting to know more has led to breakouts in every field of endeavor. When he saw birds fly, he tried to make himself wings; not succeeding for many thousands of years did not dim his attempts to master the skill, he figured out eventually how to fly.

Step by step, sometimes with many years of seemingly no progress in a given field of endeavor, he learns and with a little knowledge makes tiny steps and overcomes great barriers. It seems the only field he really cannot figure out is his own behavior. He has never learned the rules of what one of my teachers called "Sand Box 101."

But to get back to me, when I look in the mirror, what do I see? Just an ordinary human, not one of special physique, not particularly attractive, without any obvious plus or minus embellishments, yet I am outliving most of my peers. WHY? Luck. Luck is something that happens completely out of one's control! For example, the parents who begot you, and there it stops.

As soon as an individual begins to make choices their luck plays a lesser part in their ability to survive and stupidity takes over. Not smart but less stupid, also endowed and enforced by my parents with the ability to teach and my ability to learn.

The ethnicity into which I was born demanded that there is an obligation enforced by the community in which we lived, on all parents. In the first thirteen years of new life, parents are expected to prepare their newborn with the necessary skills to survive on their own. The most important of these skills was to "LEARN TO THINK" to "avoid stupid mistakes."

This obligation of parenting, which the community enforced diligently, was taken very seriously by my parents. In all their teaching the first thirteen years of my life, never was the goal of learning to survive ever very far from their mind. Always when I questioned something I was admonished with, "Stop and think."