

Off The Planet, Now!

*Thoughts on the connection between world population,
youth crime and adult fitness*

BY FRED STENSON

When I was a parent of young children, I was always sick. Meanwhile, my childless friends and co-workers, many of whom led outrageous lives of continuous partying and little sleep, were always well. What did it mean? Until my children grew up a bit, I could not solve the mystery. Then, when my sinuses finally cleared, I did.

The reason was that my children were trying to kill me. Okay, "trying" is putting it theatrically, as there was no actual intent. More precisely, they were biologically programmed to kill me. Since the first human being crawled from the primordial ooze, this has been one of the most important jobs of the young — to move the older generation off the planet. If they were ever to fail, imagine the consequences.

Killing me was also a simple business for my children. All they had to do was reach into the breeze and grab every interesting looking virus that floated by. They would get sick for a day or two and, instead of being harmed, they were improved.



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Each illness bolstered their baby immune systems, and made them stronger and more ready for the viruses to come.

On the parental side of the equation, things are not so sunny. While comforting and staying up nights with sick children, parents invariably contract whatever illness is currently in vogue. Long after the child is well again, and racing

through the house looking for things to experimentally destroy, the parents remain ill. They drag themselves around pitifully, falling asleep at the dinner table, baby spoons heaped with crushed apricot in hand.

This period does not kill parents, not as a rule. It only weakens them. At this stage, like little boxers, your children are just softening you up with body blows. The knockout punch comes later.

The teenage years. Your teenage son pleads to borrow the car, swearing oaths that he will do only good works at low speed while behind the wheel. Perhaps he will begin the evening by making a few deliveries

for the food bank. He will stop at all crosswalks, including the empty ones, just in case a pedestrian is there but perfectly camouflaged. Then he proceeds to pick up 12 drunken friends and they head for the country for a game of demolition derby in the swamp.

It is not out of the question that a parent, confronted with a child in police custody, and a car

that was worth \$30,000 yesterday and 10 cents today, might drop dead. A spring might pop out of the person's head and sayonara. My point? That this too is part of nature's plan.

The knock-out punch. Try to remember that your child, while possibly criminally responsible for

what he or she does, is biologically innocent. A little voice in the genes is saying, "Move them on. Get them hence." Your teenage children did not put that voice there and it was you, after all, who taught them to listen.

Moving on to youth crime and the generally held belief that

teenagers are worse now than they used to be. Remembering my own teenage years, when my mother used to race to the cupboard and down a Valium if the phone rang, just in case it was me, I sometimes wonder about the air-tight validity of this one. But, supposing it is true, I have a reason, within the bounds of my theory, that might explain it.

If teenagers are worse now than they ever were before, more inclined to extreme and criminal behaviour, it may result from their parents being too physically fit. Think about it. Here you are, a teenager, dragging yourself out of bed and feeling exhausted by the effort, and what's the first thing you see?

You see Dad in a jogging suit heading out for a 10K run before work. You see Mom, in skin-tight, fluorescent-pink Spandex, leaping up and down in front of the TV. If in the reptilian cortex of your human brain, there is a code blinking red that says, "Your job is to weaken and finally destroy these people," how do you feel?

Immensely frustrated, that's how you feel! Your parents aren't weakening. They don't appear to be edging toward the grave. If anything, they're looking younger. In other words, they're gaining on you.

Seeing this svelte, never-fitter, never-younger group of middle-aged baby boomers has to be terrible for teenagers. Mass feelings of failure and helplessness must result. Is it any wonder then that some give up the age-old, tried-and-true, gradual methods of parent-offing and go to something more swift and direct?

Does this mean you should stop loving them? Of course not. You should love them all the more. But, please, at least consider slowing up on the exercise. A few more doughnuts a week wouldn't hurt, and considerably more red meat. If the population is indeed "greying," as statistics indicate, how about letting a little of that grey show?

Meanwhile, watch your back. ☸