

“We didn’t start the fire/It was always burning/Since the world’s been turning/We didn’t start the fire/No, we didn’t light it/But we tried to fight it.”

—Billy Joel

WHEN I WAS EIGHT OR NINE, my parents let me stay up to see in my first New Year’s. I toughed it out, fought off the Sandman and managed to stay awake. I don’t know what I expected, but surely it would be something grand, unlike anything I’d ever before experienced in my brief existence on the planet — Christmas morning, birthday and the World Series all wrapped into one.

I watched the ball drop in Times Square. Nothing spectacular considering my parents had a black and white TV. Mom and Dad whooped and hollered, tipped back what might’ve been champagne, shared a kiss, and I went to bed thinking, *That’s it? What’s the big deal?*

It didn’t help that the next day was business as usual. The news reported on the war in Vietnam and peace demonstrations turned violent. Race tensions ran high, although the 1968 riots in Detroit were still a couple years away, and the Cold War with Russia was escalating.

Even at my tender age I could see it was the same old same old, despite what the calendar said.

Forty-five years later, I can honestly say New Year’s hasn’t changed all that much. People make resolutions to eat better and lose weight, exercise more, curse less, find a better job, quit smoking, budget better, spend more time with family. Sadly, within two weeks, certainly before the end of January, most people revert to the same old same old, perhaps finding comfort in old habits, even if they are bad habits.

The war in Vietnam is over, as is the Cold War, replaced by an occupation of Iraq and a troop buildup in Afghanistan. Racial tensions have been replaced by a broken healthcare system, an ailing economy, and unemployment higher than at any time in my life. The planet grows smaller with greater technology even as the incongruence between the haves and the have nots continues to grow at an alarming rate.

The faces and names change, but each generation has its obstacles to overcome. My grandparents rose up out of the depths of the Great Depression. My parents left the Baby Boomer generation a better world in the aftermath of World War II. But I sense the Boomers left Gen X a much colder world in which to live. Time will tell what the Millennium generation will make of what Gen X left them.

Barack Obama took office not quite a year ago, behind a vote to leave behind the same old same old, kindling hope for a better tomorrow; yet today his approval ratings are at their lowest.

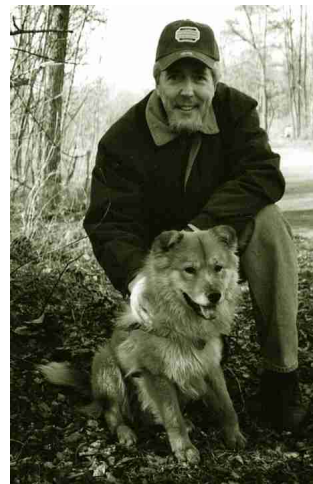
So what of the future? Are you hopeful that the economy is on the rebound? Are you making resolutions to eat more organic foods and lose weight, exercise more, find a better job, quit smoking, perhaps pay off a debt?

Or are you fearful for our way of life in this country, fearful for the future of humanity and of Planet Earth? Are you concerned that the Mayan calendar ends on December 21, 2012, or that the predictions of Nostradamus also end in 2012? Perhaps you buy into the theory of a major shift in the earth’s poles that will have catastrophic effects on the future of life on our planet, or a major blackout the result of sun storms disrupting our power sources.

Will you go on with your life in 2010 and beyond, same old same old, devil may care, don’t sweat the big picture because I can’t make a difference anyway?

One thing is certain: change is on the way, perhaps as a result of our unwillingness to do something when we still had the chance. Whether December 21, 2012, is the end or a new beginning, perhaps it’s time to resolve to do something, regardless of whether its impact will cause ripples, simply because it’s the right thing to do.

A toast, to new. It can’t be any worse than the old.



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