

SUNFLOWER SEEDS



This space has always been a bit “sacred”, as it listed the weekly get togethers that were integral to the very essence of our group. Regrettably, for the time being there will be nothing in the way of official Kansas Sunflower Mensa gatherings.

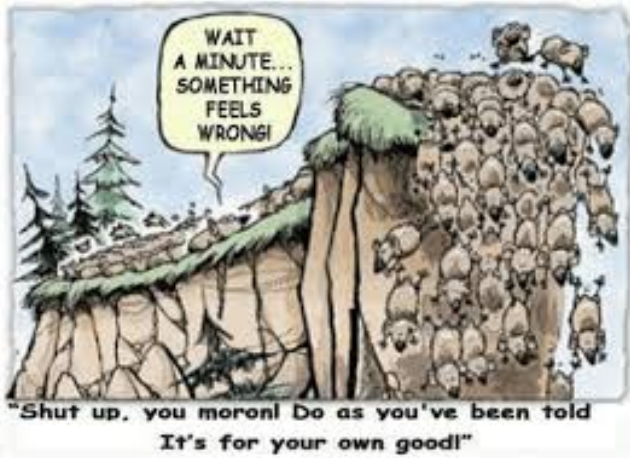
I remember back on 9/11, looking up at the sky and seeing no contrails made me feel like civilization had ended and I was left alone in this World to ponder the errors of my species. It hit me especially hard since I was a student pilot then, ready to take my check ride and start to experience the freedom that only the bird knows. Kind of a shock to find my local airport shuttered and deserted, like some creepy post-apocalyptic movie set. The World has changed I mumbled to myself.

I drive through parts of town that just weeks ago were the center of nightlife and a hub of activity. All sorts of preppy bars, coffee shops and boutiques bustled with business day and night, now stand dark, shuttered and empty. Whole sections of the city are a virtual ghost town. People are frightened, out of work if not destitute, seeing no glimmer of hope save some pathetic government check to shut them up for a while.

The World has changed again, and wherever this road will eventually end, only one thing is certain; we are living in a historical time. Will it be remembered fondly as our “finest hour” or be discussed in solemn, hushed tones as the dread time of...

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Kansas Sunflower Mensa Newsletter



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In March our Pig Out location was Two Olives Restaurant & Bar, 2949 N. Rock Road, Wichita. We have been to Two Olives more than once before, and it is always a popular spot with our group. It has good food at reasonable prices. They also have a really big table for us to sit at.

The March Program Meeting was a presentation by Micaeh Tice of EagleFire Enrichment. Micaeh is knowledgeable, authentic, and relatable! Her plans focus on reaching one smaller, easily attainable goal at a time in order to work towards the big goal for the future. Her ideas are positive, motivational, and helpful for making lifestyle changes!

Elsewhere in this issue of the *Sunflower Seeds* is a copy of the draft of the *Kansas Sunflower Mensa Statement on Civility and Freedom of Speech*. This was discussed during an open meeting held immediately after the January Program Meeting. A copy of the statement is also on our web site under articles. It is our intention of formally adopting this statement, with perhaps amendments, by the Kansas Sunflower Mensa Executive Committee to be a guide for our local group when issues addressed in the statement come up in the future. You still have opportunity to provide feedback or suggestions on this document before the Executive Committee votes on it: it is still a draft, and not yet official. Please email feedback to locsec@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org and mark the email with "Civility" in the subject line for easy identification.

Please note that the Executive Committee of Kansas Sunflower Mensa has decided **to cancel all official meetings of our local group for the month of April**. This is in keeping with the National Emergency that the president of the US has declared and concerns over the COVID-19 virus (coronavirus disease of 2019). This is unfortunate, but we must do our part to impede the spread of this virus. We will revisit this situation in mid-April to decide about May.

Kansas Sunflower Mensa

Statement on Civility and Freedom of Speech

DRAFT: January 11, 2020

Conversation and the free exchange of information in Kansas Sunflower Mensa (KSM) meetings is highly valued. We should all feel free to express ourselves in KSM meetings, knowing that our ideas will be welcomed and carefully considered. For many of us, this is the most important part of being in Mensa.

We must be willing to entertain (or at least tolerate) the ideas of others if we also wish to have our own ideas entertained (or tolerated). If we wish others to consider what we have to say, we must, in turn, respect those to whom we are speaking, explain ourselves carefully, not expecting anyone to agree with us simply because we say it, but be able to express ourselves in a convincing way, with reasons given, and be open to entertain the questions that we receive from those listening to us. With these concepts in mind, the following guidelines are offered to enhance the free exchange of ideas in our meetings.

KSM chooses to promote an atmosphere for discourse which is characterized by openness, mutual respect, and trust along with a willingness to have one's ideas, arguments, and beliefs vigorously challenged to continually refine and improve them. We encourage a critical examination of competing points of view where no such view is immune to examination and challenge. It is paramount for the success of such discourse that there is a norm of not personalizing arguments with gratuitous slurs or name-calling. No participant should be excluded, humiliated, or intimidated during such discussions. No probing into clearly personal and private information that is uncomfortable for the individual involved should be permitted. It is our desire to eliminate any atmosphere of intimidation, but rather to encourage an open exchange of ideas and points of view which leads to intellectual and spiritual growth and refinement for all participants.

- Content is inappropriate that is pornographic, or images containing nudity or graphic or gratuitous violence, where the inclusion of such contributes little, if anything, to the intellectual content of the discussion.
- Content is inappropriate that is unnecessarily long, and where most would judge that any central point has been lost. The purpose of the exchange is discussion on an agreed upon topic. We must be aware of how what we are saying is being received, with the purpose of communication.
- All personal attacks are inappropriate, as are inflammatory or antagonistic comments, as are comments making fun of or belittling others and/or their beliefs, age, intelligence, career choices, or credentials, etc. The focus should be on the agreed upon topic. Avoid conversation that does not contribute to a fair and honest discussion.
- All hostile behavior, such as bullying, is forbidden. All such actions reveal weakness in the position of the one exercising such behavior, not the one who is being bullied.
- Ignoring requests to return to the agreed upon topic is also inappropriate. Staying on topic is a sign of intelligent discourse, and we encourage it.



Heartland Mensa Region 7



Yesterday evening I judged the last of my assigned batch of essays in the MERF Scholarship competition. Thanks in part (I think) to the new electronic essay submission process, we seem to have had a much heavier load to work through than in previous years. Good for getting the Mensa name out there, not so

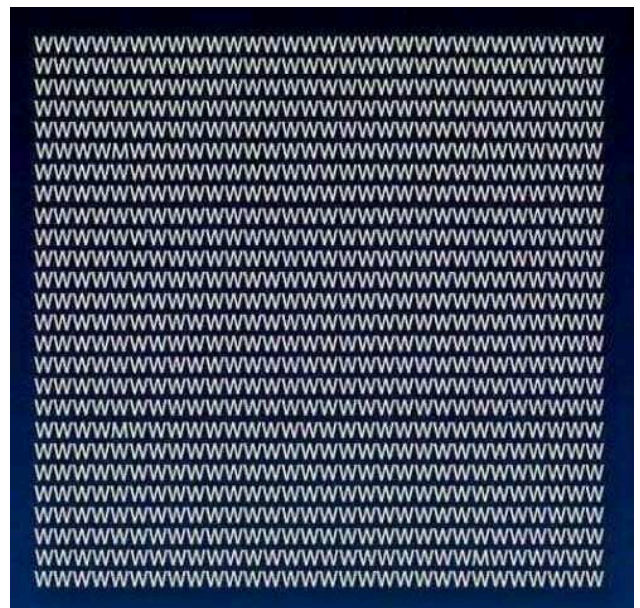
good for the volunteer judging crews. I'd like to salute those folks by name but there's not enough room in the column for that and besides, some prefer to stay in the background. So anonymous thanks, people – your work makes it possible for the winning students to continue toward the goals they write about so eloquently.

And what essays they were – some more polished than others, of course, but most laid out thoughtful plans for a better future for their authors and the people with whom they will come in contact. They confirm for me that the scholarship program fosters human intelligence for the benefit of humanity, which is Mensa's primary purpose.

Smooth segue into the next topic – National Volunteer Week, always the third week of April, runs from the 19th through the 25th this year. No coincidence so does *Mensa Cares*, our very own service project coordinated by National's Community Service Committee but decided upon, arranged for and run at the local level. What's your Local Group doing this year? Cleaning up a park or highway? Sorting cans at a food bank or donated books at a library? Collecting supplies for the homeless? (Sorry, eating Girl Scout cookies doesn't count.) Write up a short paragraph about it and take a photo or two – we'd like to honor lots of Local Group projects at us.mensa.org/volunteer/community-service/.

One Mensa event that's usually in April slid to Sunday, May 3 this year -- CultureQuest®, our nationwide team trivia contest. I used to tell my students, "Any question's easy if you know the answer," but that's the challenge and why the team's the key. You need someone who knows history, someone who knows literature, someone who knows sports, someone who knows science, someone who knows nursery rhymes... If you're reading this before Tuesday March 31, get that group of polymaths together and register at us.mensa.org/attend/culturequest/. Entry fees go to support the MERF Scholarship Fund.

Spring is here, or it should be by the time you read this. Time for flowers and cavorting! ~Rich



Find the M in the picture.

Difficult for some, easy for others.

Shelter in the open, or Open-Air Treatment. The most sensible action to minimize the harm inflicted by the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak. By: R. Klaus Trenary

There are many unanswered questions in our search for the appropriate response to this newest outbreak. Misinformation is as rampant as the emotions unleashed by the developments of this unprecedented moment in history.

It is our contention that the “shelter in place” policy that is being widely embraced in the USA to counter the spread of infectious viruses is inadequate if not misguided. Some basic assumptions about the efficacy of this antiquated “cordone sanitaire” (quarantine of people and dissenting information) must be seriously questioned.

Rather than being locked up together like inmates, people must be encouraged to spend more time at a distance wherever possible and in the bright sunshine and out of doors.

There is growing evidence that bright sunlight can kill thousands if not millions of virions (infectious viral influenza particles) in a short time period, making it unlikely that anyone spending time in bright sunlight out of doors would become infected or infect others. Numerous studies have shown that strong sunlight, particularly at 254nm UVC with flux densities of 4-12 J/m² has a pronounced viricidal effect. Many civilian and military laboratories, research facilities and hospitals currently use this method to sterilize large areas. It is universally considered extremely effective. Because coronavirus has the largest genome of any related virus, it is very susceptible to genetic damage via UVC and is more easily killed. (McDevitt JJ, Rudnick SN, Radonovich LJ. *Aerosol Susceptibility of Influenza Virus to UV-C Light. Applied and Environmental Microbiology.* 2011; 06-2012: p. 1666-1669. doi:10.1128/AEM.06960-11)

An obscure paper on one particular “open-air” hospital in Boston that was used to treat victims of the deadly 1918 pandemic virus clearly shows that a ‘shelter in the open’ policy reduced infection rates and mortality among patients and staff. (Am J Public Health.2009;99: S236-S242. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2008.134627)

It is also known that influenza infections are very seasonal, and the rates of infection go down significantly in the heat of Summer. Studies in Brazil have shown a correlation between bright sunlight and reduced incidence of flu-like disease.

There are two predominant routes of infection: A person contacts a non-porous infected surface, although clothing can be infectious to a lesser degree.

The inoculated fingers are used to rub the eyes, pick the nose or put in the mouth, all of which allow entry of the virus into your body, and finally the lower respiratory tract.

The other route of infection is believed to be via inhaling droplets of fluid mixed with virus particles that were sneezed or coughed out.

Being restricted to a small area in close proximity to other sedentary people and animals, breathing stagnant non-replenished air often laden with mold spores and other pathogens not only guarantees that the probability of transmission is massive, but encourages the transmission of numerous other contagious conditions as well. You are not only rebreathing someone else’s air, there is the matter of airborne exudates (sweat, spit, nasal secretions, sputum) and detritus (hair, sloughed off skin cells). Being confined indoors for long periods is also psychologically damaging, especially if there are many people involved. Depression, boredom, anxiety, negativity and even violence increases with every day locked up.

Common knowledge amongst health care professionals is that another useful side effect of spending more time outside would be an elevation of mood and a suppression of negative emotions, alleviating many of the symptoms of depression and improved immune system function.

The mood and mind-set out of doors is a totally different from confined spaces and is an infinitely more healthful environment for all involved.



Figure 1: A Medieval Lazaretto or Pest-House used to quarantine those too poor for proper care and who were consigned to be deserted and die from incurable diseases.

A few hours a day out of doors while maintaining enough distance to avoid direct contact would greatly reduce the chances of catching the virus from others.

It is widely agreed to be healthful and beneficial. Tanning lotion or a UV sunscreen would be used to reduce the chances of dermal problems while providing a physical barrier to reduced infection.

Until more exact data are available, the UV index issued by most area weather services could be used as a rough guide to measure the degree of safety against infection/transmission. A “low” reading would provide minimal protection, while a “very high” condition would provide significant protection.

Safe spacing between all parties could easily be maintained in parks or even sidewalks and yards, much more so than indoors. An expedient method to keep a safe distance is simply to stand up straight, hold your arms out horizontally with fingers outstretched and make a mental note of the distance to your fingertips. Never get closer than that distance to any other person. In a small group everyone does the same thing and so long as they are not touching, everything is fine. In parks and public areas signs and even outstretched ropes would easily show visitors what a safe distance was. Even a small child could grasp the concept and stay safe.

Face masks in public should be obligatory. They do little to stop you from inhaling the virus but are a courtesy to everyone else as you can be contagious before you show any symptoms. Masks do reduce the amount of viral material expelled, so don't wear them for yourself, wear them for everybody else.

Spitting or blowing one's nose in public would be subject to fine and be considered gross, disgusting, crude and unacceptable. No physical contact with non-in-group people would be allowed including but not limited to kissing, hugging and hand shaking.

In bright sunlight, if a person was infected and unmasked, any contagious exudate expelled would be rendered non-contagious and relatively harmless in a short period depending on several factors. Larger expelled particles (coughed or sneezed) would usually not travel far and be precipitated to the ground following a roughly parabolic trajectory. After adhering to soil or vegetation, the pathogen would be rendered relatively safe, immobile and generally non-infectious.

One of the main routes of transmission are from contact with infected surfaces, the non-porous ones being called fomites. Any droplets that might impinge on other surfaces could be easily, quickly and cheaply annihilated with a myriad of very effective and commonly available anti-viral compounds. Many common detergents, oxidizers and alcohols including ethanol work great.

Most parts of the country have wind or air movement a large percentage of the time if not almost daily. Even a slight breeze would quickly reduce the concentration of viral particles a thousand-fold compared to a sealed area. These tiny droplets might seem very dangerous except for one fact.

The small size of the suspended infectious droplet would make it extremely susceptible to penetration of high energy UVC photons. These virions, these minute bundles of contagion would be killed within a relatively short period of time in bright sunlight and rendered impotent and harmless.

Many parents are now stuck at home due to massive shutdowns and lay-offs. The children are home from school for at least half a year. Parents and caregivers would relish the chance of getting rid of the kids for a few hours to enjoy some “me time”.

Both adults and kids benefit from walking, jogging, running, biking, skateboarding in the sunshine, alone or with loved ones. No one can argue the health benefits of fresh air, the out of doors and increased activity. Perhaps it's time to start that long put off exercise program.

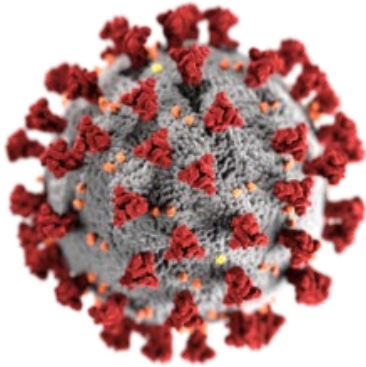
Although proven effective in several studies and capable of saving countless thousands, this measure would be of enormous benefit if even only a few extra lives were saved. The more salient reward is much more abstract, but of an even greater need, nonetheless. It would be used to instill a desperately needed sense of hope in the populous that they are not powerless to stand up to this unseen threat. That they have some control over their lives and destiny, and that they will ultimately conquer and survive.

The ‘shelter in the open proposal’ is doable, can be implemented quickly and at very minimal cost and low level of societal disruption. The plan will work because of its simplicity, general acceptance and usefulness. Let our humble community go down in the pages of history as a bastion of calm, reason and logic, who's leaders had the foresight to take a “road less travelled”, shunning the rampant fear that now pervades the rest of our great country.



Please visit the Mensa website or Facebook, listed on page two for further material not available on the print version.

Hyper Dangerous or Dangerous Hype, SARS-CoV-2 Virus?



Any death can be viewed as a tragedy, but like it or not, you are going to die. The survival rate for anyone after being born eventually drops to 0.0%. Whatever the courses of action taken during this historic event, there promises to be loss of life and increased suffering for the many. The only salient option is to minimize total, not just immediate damage. A poorly rationalized, antiquated, knee-jerk reaction threatens to unravel 200 years of social progress.

All we hear ad nauseum from the media is the possible shortage of respirators or hospital beds. While these are significant concerns, they are only a small percentage of the “big equation” and becomes rather trivial when compared to the panic & fear, the social and economic destruction that has been so far richly meted out. “Flattening the curve” simply means spreading the deaths out further, not reducing them.

In my opinion the “pandemic” though milder than most, but deadlier than some, is a wildly overblown, knee-jerk reaction. The panic generated by this “grand social experiment” will have long lasting repercussions that will cause massive harm, far in excess of what would result from a less draconian course of action. Most disturbing is that the ensuing panic and economic damage punishes a large stratum of society that are the least able to weather any sort of hardship, let alone another “great depression”.

As the following data clearly shows, other kinds of “common” influenzas kill ten of thousands of Americans every year with nary a mention. Why is this virus when examined under many metrics, found to be not any more dangerous than many other “pandemic” strains that have infected millions of Americans every year?

Around 200,000 Americans are hospitalized each year because of the flu, [with the mortality rate between 4.2% and 10% of those hospitalized](#), based on the Center for Disease Control numbers. Most people who catch the flu, however, are never hospitalized so the overall mortality rate is much lower, less than 1%.



*The top range of these burden estimates are from the 2017-2018 flu season. These are preliminary and may change as data are finalized.

CDC estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9 million – 45 million illnesses, between 140,000 – 810,000 hospitalizations and between 12,000 – 61,000 deaths annually since 2010. CDC estimates that so far this season there have been at least 36 million flu illnesses, 370,000 hospitalizations and 22,000 deaths from flu. (NOTE: not the coronavirus, but the common flu)

Perhaps naively, I believe in intelligence and technology as the “God” that will save us if only embraced. It grieves me to say that even after over a hundred years since the last great pandemic, with all of mankind’s technological advances, occidental science can offer us nothing better than hand washing, quarantines and face masks. This was all medicine could offer then and there is very little better now save a few anti-virals of not great efficacy, that are already less effective because of pathogen resistance.

At best the government responses were made by double digit IQs, those of little ability to reason critically or intellectually and were ill thought out. It takes little intellect to figure out that the way the media and government have ramped up the level of hysteria, hoarding and panic would instantly ensue. If the “solution” results in an order of magnitude more damage than inaction would have caused, common sense dictates it would be a grave mistake and a fool’s errand.

Why is it expedient that this yearly bout of flu is singled out as a pretense to shackle our individual freedoms? If a foreign power invaded our country and seized control, subjecting the citizenry to the deprivations that they are now subject to, we would rise and slay the oppressors without mercy. Will the next step be quarantines that turn entire cities like Denver, San Francisco and New York into huge makeshift Lazarettos and repositories for the dead?

Will the pyres to the fallen throngs light the night skies, reminiscent of the black death of medieval times?

Embracing the tenet of “yelling fire in a crowded theater” and allowing panic and fear to grip every citizen of America, seems not just counterproductive if preserving Democracy is one’s priority, it is culpable, criminal if not sadistic.

Other than perhaps blaming God, who after all in his infinite wisdom created this presumably dread contagion, I find it difficult to ascribe blame to any single person or entity.



Figure 2: Many have burned for expressing heretical views that are contrary to the status quo. A reporter on national TV was recently fired for daring to question and not blindly endorse stated policies.

The media however appears to be complicit with the power mongers and should be held accountable for instilling unnecessary pain and terror. The ignorance and manipulability of the populous was used not only to bump up viewer ratings and profits, but to sway public opinion itself, for whatever veiled & nefarious ends.

I may have taken too much to heart, but in High School government class there was a lengthy discussion about how the

government's only reason to justify its continued existence was to serve the people and not the other way around.

What should have been done:

- (1) Prior to any announcement a freeze on all hoarding should have been enacted and enforced on a local, state & federal level.
- (2) An immediate freeze of the trading of securities and the stock market.
- (3) 'Shelter in the Sun' programs should have been initiated on a national level, and people instructed on hand washing, proper separation and appropriate hygiene.
- (4) All businesses would remain open so long as they complied with minimum safety standards regarding disinfection.
- (5) Psychological counseling as well as appropriate medications should be made widely available.
- (6) Monitoring of news media to ensure that panic is not spread and that calm, and order be the paramount considerations.
- (7) Make long term low interest loans and grants available so that any business capable of holding over 40 people can install UVC devices to sterilize the air and surroundings.



"THAT'S ODD: MY FACEBOOK FRIENDS WHO WERE CONSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARS JUST A MONTH AGO ARE NOW INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERTS...."

In a small Mid-Western American town, a small band of squirrels had become quite a problem.

The Presbyterian church called a meeting to decide what to do about their squirrel infestation. After much prayer and consideration, they concluded that the squirrels were predestined to be there, and they shouldn't interfere with God's divine will.

At the Baptist church the squirrels had taken an interest in the Baptistry. The deacons met and decided to put a waterslide on the Baptistry and let the squirrels drown themselves. The squirrels liked the slide and, unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim, so twice as many squirrels showed up the following week.

The Lutheran church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures. So, they humanely trapped their squirrels and set them free near the Baptist church. Two weeks later the squirrels were back when the Baptists took down the water-slide

The Episcopalians tried a much more unique path by setting out pans of whiskey around their church in an effort to kill the squirrels with alcohol poisoning They sadly learned how much damage a band of drunk squirrels can do.

But the Catholic church came up with a more creative strategy! They baptized all the squirrels and made them members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

And not much was heard from the Jewish synagogue. They took the first squirrel and circumcised him. They haven't seen a squirrel since.



**Continued from March –
Shuttle Pre Launch - 1/39/0008**

Everything was checked, packed and ready to go. Early morning everyone was at the launch site except Amie. She had checked everything herself. It was time for another set of eyes. There would be an inventory of everything, and all systems checked. Everything had to be secured. This was no hop the pond flight. It was almost like the launch from Maireda after the first landing. They would be in deep space in a stellar orbit to rendezvous with Ship 3. Problems were expected. Something would go wrong when they met the other ship, it was damaged, they just did not know what. They could not afford anything going wrong with the shuttles.

“Bob, you check Alpha. I will check Beta. Take your crew. See if I missed anything.” said James the Lieutenant and they were off to check each other’s shuttles.

“Sure James. Did you remember to bring your head?” laughed Bob.

“Did you remember to wear your pants?” laughed James back. Once on a cold weather mission Bob forgot his pants but was wearing his long underwear until he stepped outside realizing the mistake. No one let him forget.

“Got them on. Do they have to be right side out?” retorted Bob. Everyone was feeling good about the trip. But Amie felt out of place not being able to go, she was the Captain and should have been leading the trip. Success was changing roles.

James and crew went into Beta on a mission. They would find something, anything to report. Not expecting anything out of place they were being thorough anyway. They had to find something on Bob.

After hours of searching Michael said: “Hey, look at this.” pointing to the toilet paper. Half a roll short.

“Write it up.” said James.

“Come up here to the cockpit.” said Sam. They all went up. The flight log was missing. It was an old-fashioned paper flight log as the backup in case technology failed. It was obvious, a checker trap. They did it on purpose.

“Find it said James. It is here somewhere.”

“How?” said Michael.

“It smells like paper.” said James. After a long search Michael went for one of Mindy’s beagles. The dog would find it. When he returned with the dog it was so happy for the attention and chance to escape the kennel. The dogs were numerous now and did not get so much attention. They were not allowed to run free.

The colony did not want to start wild dogs. At first Mindy used the dogs to produce other species with embryo transfer. But then they quit breeding. The drugs that prevented the body from rejecting the other species prevented them from conceiving later. The dogs breed and nothing happened, and they could not support embryo transfers. Then she discovered the cure. Some of the mushrooms had hormone precursors. Some manipulated the immune system one way and another. After a little experimenting with the mushrooms the dogs were back to normal.

“I have him.” said Michael and turned the dog loose. “Find the paper. Do it. Good boy.” declared Michael. The dog wandered around confused.

James found another log from the past and let the dog smell it. “Go find it!” said James. Now the dog had a mission. He knew what to look for and was everywhere smelling everything. After searching the cockpit, they took him into the crew area. The dog went straight for Sam’s bunk and put his nose under the mattress. “Sniff, sniff, woof, woof.” said the beagle.

“He found it!” exclaimed Michael. “Must be good for something.” The checker trap was found, and they had until dinner to finish inspecting the ship.

“He was thinking like me.” thought James. “But I hid mine better.”

Bob was searching Alpha. They had to find something out of place, if only to give James a hard time. And he could not miss the checker trap. He knew James would do that. And give him no quarter if he missed it. “I have the cockpit. Sally you check the crew area. Doug check the cargo area.” Everyone had a checklist and instructions to look for anything out of place.

Bob sat in the command seat and surveyed the instrument panel. Then he looked behind him. Turning on the computer inventory system he searched the monitor for anything out of place. The auto scan said nothing was missing. They knew that James thought he was a hacker so maybe it was here somewhere. “Okay, Beta, what was James last entry?”

“Access denied.” responded the ship with her computer voice.

“Its here.” thought Bob as he typed in the administrator code. “Okay, Alpha, what was James’ last entry?” repeated Bob.

“Joke Report in the cargo inventory.” responded the ship.

“Read Joke Report.” said Bob.

The computer lit the air on fire in her dull monotone voice as everyone was heaving with laughter.

“Okay, Alpha, stop report.” said Bob. “Delete Joke Report.” It did not belong there. That was the checker trap.

“Joke Report deleted.” said Alpha.

“Keep searching.” said Bob. “There is more to find here.” They were off to finish their checklists.

Sally came up to the cockpit and said: “No toiletries in the head. They were all under Michael’s bed. I cannot find anything out of place on the checklist.

Doug came up to the cockpit too and said: “Nothing missing on the checklist.”

“The systems are all good.” said Bob. “Everything is ready to go. This is so simple compared to old timey spaceships.

The old ships had hundreds of people checking everything and still blew up rockets on the launch pad. The old guys learned a lot and now everything is relatively safe and automated.”

“Dinner time!” Lisa boomed over the speaker.

“Let’s go.” they all said. It would be their last normal meal for more than half a Dianna.



Shuttle Launch - 1/40/0008

It was dawn and the crews were in the shuttles and ready. Shuttle trips were almost routine, but this one was different. They would not be protected by the magnetosphere. The shuttles had a relatively thin protective layer compared to the ship.

The ship was dormant in orbit and they had considered taking it, but the shuttles were a quicker way to get there and ship 3 was in trouble. Amie was monitoring everything as air traffic controller.

James and Bob and their crews were running the ship analysis one last time. All systems were nominal.

“Alpha reporting. All systems are nominal.” declared James. “Permission to launch?” asked James.

“Alpha, permission granted.” commanded Amie.

In a flash Alpha was in the sky and on the way. Nothing like the massive old timey rockets with gigantic fire and people miles back. More like a small jet airplane coated with a heat and radiation shield taking off. Like the ship it was covered in concrete made from asteroids, but a thin layer of highly refined concrete. It would take less than an ounce of fuel to get to the destination and back.

“Beta reporting. All systems are nominal.” declared Bob. “Permission to launch?” asked Bob.

“Beta, permission granted.” commanded Amie.

Everyone watched. They had seen many shuttle launches, it was routine, but this seemed different. After they were gone everyone returned to their duties.

It took one orbit to get into position and they were off leaving planet orbit and entering stellar orbit. They could now see Maarieda and Dianna as big blue and green balls floating in space. They had not seen Maarieda like that since landing the first time.

James put the communication on the big screen so everyone could watch. People back on the planet could see too.

“Ship 3, this is Alpha. We are on our way.” stated James.

“We are ready.” replied Haluk.

“How is your ship?” asked James.

“Low on fuel, low on atmosphere, nominal on position.”

We will be entering orbit parallel to Maarieda tomorrow. You have our coordinates. It is lower risk if we do not enter Maarieda orbit.”

“How is your crew?” asked James.

“Excited. We are all ready to get out of this can. Helen is worse. When it seems she cannot get any worse she does. Everyone is upset just to see her like that. Everyone else is so healthy.”

“We brought medical supplies. I will patch you into Mindy, the physician. Do you have any medical supplies?” asked James.

“No, they were lost in the shuttles and the little we had is used up.” replied Haluk. “We are pretty much on our own as far as that goes.”

“Okay, here is Mindy.” said James as he connected Haluk to a private channel with Mindy. Now it was time to wait. Hurry up and wait. They studied more of Dianna as they flew past. More pictures to analyze. It was good to get more data. If the Exploration Ship ever came it had satellites, rovers, a submarine, and landing equipment for other planets. There was a lot to see in their stellar system, but they were limited to one small satellite, small telescopes on Maarieda and the ship.

Later privately James talked to Mindy. “Can you do anything?” asked James.

“Not without supplies and equipment.” replied Mindy.

“It would be a shame to be so close and lose her.” sighed James.

“It would.” replied Mindy.

Approach - February 5, 0008

“Tomorrow is rendezvous day.” said James. Everyone was watching the monitors. “We can see the ship in our telescope and the damage looks bad. It is possible that it could be repaired with shuttles and docked in orbit. Wow. What a big chunk of shield gone. The front was about as thin as the sides.”

Now it was time to be busy. Everyone was getting ready. Alpha would dock first. When everything was examined the second shuttle could dock. They would not put both at risk.

When it was bedtime no one felt like sleeping, the excitement was too much.

On Ship 3 Haluk was going over everything with the crew. They were excited and worried. They knew the damage was bad but did not know if the shuttles could dock.

Or if they were actually going to get out of the can they were living in. It seemed like a home before hitting the debris. And it would not hold atmosphere. The leak was too small to detect, and they were out of sealant. Like many other things it was lost on the shuttles. Another half year and it would be impossible to breathe. Everyone spent time with Helen. They all thought it would be her last, but no one would say so. She knew.

Meeting Ship 3 - February 6, 0008

The shuttles were approaching ship 3. They adjusted their orbits so one would be on each side of the ship. The damage was impressive.

“Wow look at that.” said James. “It is surprising the ship was still in one piece. There is a big chunk out of one side. I can see a small part of the skin of the ship.”

“We know.” said Haluk. “We used the last of the sealant we had on that area. And piled supplies there to keep out as much radiation as possible.”

“I am sending robots to inspect your ship before we try to dock.” said James. “How are the docking doors? Are they damaged?”

“The doors seem okay. There is superficial damage everywhere. We can open and close the shield at both doors and the shield is intact there. From the inside everything is good at the doors.” said Haluk.

“The robots are on the way. They will photograph the whole ship and take samples of everything.” said James.

“Good.” said Haluk. “I will send you the data we have. We only sent out the robots when we had to. Some were lost when we were jettisoning the shuttles.”

“Robot 23 is at the forward shield.” said Doug. “It is totally cratered and has high radioactivity. The radiation spectrum shows everything from thorium to californium and all the lighter elements have radioactive isotopes. I cannot even leave the bot here long or we will never be able to use it again. The shield is 95 cm thick with craters of 15 cm. It is anyone’s guess how deep the radioactive elements go.”

“There is minimal radiation coming into the ship. More than we want, but not deadly.” said Haluk.

“Robot 19 has a laser that can cut off part of the shield. We did that with Ship 1. What do you say? Cut half of it off and see what is left?” said Sally. “We cut half a meter off Ship 1 and that got rid of the radiation. This is different.”

“Leave 50 cm.” said Sam. “That is design spec and we can inspect it after that.”

“Okay.” said Sally. “You have 50 cm left coming up.” And she started cutting with the robot. It would be a slow burn even with the high-powered laser. It was very hard concrete. Mined from an asteroid the aggregate was mostly made of platinum group metals making it durable in its environment. And it quickly became radioactive, essentially being the target of a particle accelerator. It was expected to lose 50 cm leaving 2 1/2 meters of shield in front of the ship.

“Robot 41 is at the hole in the side.” said Sam. “There was a channel cut in the side of the shield and it popped out a piece of concrete 95 cm in diameter where there was an antenna. It seems the antenna mount ripped a hole in the side shield and the micro sand did the rest. When the robot finishes taking samples, I will have it apply sealant. Tomorrow The robot can patch the concrete. The diamond cutter will clean up the damaged surface for better adhesion.”

“The engine area has normal wear.” said Michael. The whole heat shield is due for replacement.”

“We had to wait until we arrived to do anything.” said Haluk.

“There are only remains of antenna and telescope mounts.” said Michael.

“That’s what happened.” said Haluk.

They spent the rest of the day inspecting and working on the ship’s exterior. Near the end of the day the end of the front shield was cut off leaving a smooth flat surface with pock marks. It would have looked like new except for the radiation and pock marks.

After analysis Sam said: “Cut another 13 cm off.” They now knew what a tiny amount of space dust could do.

What seemed like a massive collision when they hit the dust was really a tiny collision with a lot of energy. The robot worked through the time they slept and Haluk’s crew took turns monitoring it. It was a sixteen-hour day and they had no trouble falling asleep. It would be a long day tomorrow.



Boarding the Ship - February 7, 0008

It was morning, human time, as space has no morning. The robot had just finished cutting another slab off the front of the ship and it looked much better.

“Looks like a clean cut.” said Sam. The robot photographed and scanned the new cut surface. “No more pock holes and it is close to the spec for wear. But it’s not going anywhere at light. Nothing left for that.”

“The hole in the side looks better.” said Michael. It is fifteen percent covered. The rest can be done over the next few days.”

The docking doors were opened, and Alpha docked with the ship. It sealed correctly and the air locks were opened on both sides. James stepped in the ship to meet an emotional crew.

“I thought we would never make it.” said Haluk.

“We all thought that.” said Vanessa. “But no one spoke a word of it. The kids thought it was normal.”

James returned to Alpha and backed away from the ship.

Beta docked with the ship at dock number two. It worked perfectly just like dock number one. It sealed correctly and the air locks were opened on both sides. Bob stepped in the ship to meet the crew. Tomorrow Alpha would dock again so they could load both shuttles.

After hugs and a short celebration there was a lot of work to do. All the supplies that were useful had to be secured in the shuttles. They would come back for the equipment the ship brought. They began sealing the ship compartment by compartment and resupplying the air supply. It was important to keep the ship alive for the future.

Loading the Shuttles - February 8, 0008

“The leak is fixed!” shouted Haluk in triumph and everyone cheered. Even stoic Haluk was jubilant now.

Alpha docked with the ship. It was time to treat Helen. She had remained in bed the whole time. Vanessa now had equipment to treat Helen and Helen was transferred to Alpha.

Blood tests and a body scan showed every kind of heavy metal. Her body was full of micro cysts encapsulating the metals.

It was not just arsenic, lead, and mercury. It was all of them. At near light speed she had been the target in the particle accelerator of space and atomic particles went through her leaving their changed elements behind. Chelation therapy had only provided a slight help before and the supplies were long gone. Vanessa started chelation on her again hoping it would help a little. Surgery could not do anything and there was no magic cure. At least she better understood what was happening inside Helen's body.



Heading Home - February 10, 0008

They were off, back to Maarieda. The ship was repaired and in a stable orbit. The cargo holds were full, and everyone was settled down for the trip. The small children were exploring everything they were allowed to explore. The main crisis was gone, and everyone felt good. Even Helen seemed marginally better.

Home Again and At Last - February 18, 0008

As they were approaching planet orbit everyone was watching the planet and its moon, two big blue green balls in space. Four of them had never seen anything like this except in books and videos. Today it was real and alive. Lilly and Andrew had a million questions and Vanessa was doing her best to explain. The sight was new to her too. She spent her entire life in space until now. No one was more excited about planet fall than Haluk. All he could say was: "Thank God we are getting out of these tin cans." The doubter was beginning to sound like a believer.

The shuttles touched ground, and everyone rushed out. Vanessa and Hans were like children running and rolling in the grass. They carried Helen to the infirmary.

Home Again and At Last - February 19, 0008

This was the big day for Helen. Mindy and Vanessa were performing tests as there was finally medical equipment to help Helen. Mindy had a plan. The experiments with mushrooms they found on the animals showed powerful healing ability. Helen was terminal. Both physicians agreed. She might linger a long time or probably not. Mindy had cured her own sterility and many ailments on her dogs. She could promote stem cells, change hormones, increase the speed of healing, grow new tissue, reduce aging, it seemed miraculous. The treatment would be experimental. Both agreed there was nothing to lose by trying. When they explained it to Helen she was excited and agreed. When she was warned she said: "I have nothing to lose. Do it."

So, they began the treatments and Hellen began to feel better.

The blood tests still looked bad, but in a week, Hellen was on her feet and taking baby steps. They were all cheering her on. Mindy was concerned. "Where is the serpent in all this?" she thought. After two weeks Hellen was walking everywhere and even took a stroll outside the building and on the grass. But the blood tests were worse. Not a surprise, the body was healing and trying to expel the foreign elements.

Hellen - February 33, 0008

Hellen woke up with a fever but was up and about like her new self. She went for her dialysis which was every three days between chelation therapy and transfusions. Her body had more toxic elements than they thought, and no amount of transfusions, dialysis, or chelation could stop the increasing amount of heavy metals in her blood stream. They had a name for the disease now: Space Dust Poisoning. By noon she collapsed and was soon gone. The diagnosis: The cure killed her. The treatment healed the micro cysts and they released the toxic elements into her blood killing her faster. At least they tried and learned. Seeing death was a new experience for most of the Maariedians. There was shock and tears and planning for a funeral, a new experience, the first on Maarieda.

Burial - February 34, 0008

Amie read Hellen's last words: "Life has been a wonderful experience. I have lived well and will have died well. Don't worry about me. Celebrate life and enjoy it. No one could have lived better than I did. Just look at all of you and a new planet that is so wonderful."

Amie said: "You can cry, but then be happy and enjoy life like Hellen said."

The small twins were confused by all of this and did not understand what was wrong with grandmother.

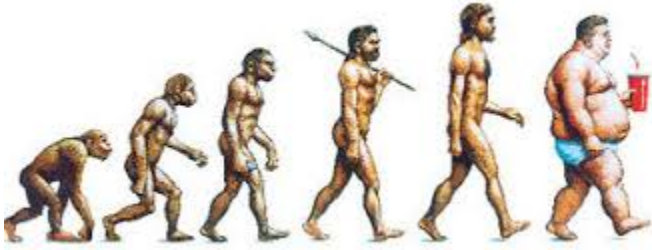
The funeral and burial brought new meaning to life and the challenges they faced. It was a new experience for most of the people there. Something they were not prepared for.

New Life - February 35, 0008

Lisa gave birth to her second child, a boy named Eric. It was a fast almost painless birth. Mindy and Vanessa were perplexed. How did these kids do this? It seemed almost like magic. Everything in their new home seemed like magic. And they found the serpent hiding in the paradise. The healing properties in the mushrooms could cure part of the body and leave the rest to self-destruct. There was so much to learn.



EVOLUTION



Which has contributed more to the advancement of the human race: our advanced mental abilities or our physical abilities?

Looking at mental contributions, our general intelligence gets some credit, as it should. Our minds can figure out what to do in situations that would baffle other animals. Another mental trait that gets some credit for our advancement is our tendency to form into groups.

No doubt, that has helped; however, that characteristic is not unique to humans. Buffalo, fish and birds also form groups.

What did physical abilities contribute? I have often read that our opposable thumbs were a big thing. I am sure they helped. But it was not only our opposable thumbs. Our hand capabilities, in general, exceed what most other animals have by a large margin. They can be positioned into a multitude of shapes that allow us to throw a ball, catch a ball, hold a pencil, open a jar, or play a piano. With what most other animals have, few could do those things, no matter how smart they were. And, don't forget our big feet that allow us to stand upright while doing those things with our hands.

Are there other physical capabilities that we have that also put us ahead of the animals? One comes to mind. It is rare, if it exists at all, in other animals. That is the ability to make a lot of different sounds with our voice box. Most animals have the ability to make some kind of sound. Birds chirp, for example. Dogs bark and cat's meow. But the sounds each species is capable of making, in most cases is quite limited. In fact, we often identify a species by the sound it can make. Cows moo, sheep bleat, ducks quack, etc.

We humans, in contrast, can make a lot of sounds. According to our alphabet we can make 26 different ones. True, some of these are redundant, like k and hard c. But on the other hand, some letters, especially vowels, represent more than one sound. Also, there are sounds that are not represented by a single letter, like th, ch and sh. That is pretty impressive. All in all, our voice boxes can probably make 35 different sounds (one dictionary of mine lists 57). It is true that many birds, like parrots, can also make many

sounds, but it seems they have never learned to use that skill. Is that a mental shortcoming?

So, how much good has this unique voice box done us? A lot. Humans, probably as far back as the Stone Age, learned to make a lot of different sounds and assign meanings to them. Thus, they had a language, although a simple one, and they could communicate. This helped them advance.

It is possible that sign language came before spoken language. If so, that still says our physical ability is what allowed it to happen. Most other animals cannot form their hands and arms into as many different positions as we can. So even if animals were as smart as humans, they could not create much of a sign language.

Eventually humans developed another talent that was helpful. They learned to write things down. That was a big step forward, but without the physical voice boxes to create the words, and the handy fingers to hold a stick, they would not have been able to do that. Again, our physical capability should get most of the credit.

The case seems strong that the reason we humans have done so well is that our bodies, not our brains, were superior. First, our great hands with an opposable thumb allowed us to make things, like a bow and arrow, a hammer, and a house. Second our voice box let us make strange noises that others could interpret as thoughts. Third, our great hands allowed us to write these things down, while our big feet kept us from falling over. No matter how smart we might have been, without these unusual physical characteristics we would not have amounted to much. Imagine even a super smart horse trying to build a barn, tell you his name, or write a sentence.

If you think our minds contributed more than our bodies did to human superiority, let me ask you this. Suppose you had the choice of: a) Having a dog's body, and your present intellect, or: b) having your current body and a dog's intellect, which would you choose? I think you would be better off with the dog's brain. Gordon Bakken



The World would be a far better place if people could just pretend to like each other!

Likes Attract, even in other Primates

New research shows that chacma baboons within a troop spend more of their time with baboons that have similar characteristics to themselves: associating with those of a similar age, dominance rank and even personality type such as boldness. This is known as homophily, or 'love of the same'.



A team of researchers led by the University of Cambridge and international conservation charity the Zoological Society of London says that this may act as a barrier to the transfer of new social information to the wider troop, as previous research done by the team shows baboons of a certain

age and personality type -- the younger, bolder animals -- are more likely to be information 'generators': those who solve new foraging problems. Given that information generators spend much of their time in the company of similar baboons, researchers say there is a risk that acquired information may end up exclusively confined to other information generators, thus decreasing the likelihood of new knowledge being disseminated to the wider troop.

Research teams tracked the same two baboon troops from dawn until dusk across Namibia's Tsaobis Nature Park over several months each year between 2009-2014 to observe patterns of behavior. The study is the first to monitor baboon social network structures over such a timescale and is published today in the journal Royal Society Open Science.

"Within these big troop networks over time social preferences are generally dictated by age, rank, personality and so on," said Dr Alecia Carter, from the University of Cambridge's Department of Zoology, first author of the study. "This happens in humans all the time; we hang out with people who have the same income, religion, education etc. Essentially, it's the same in baboons."

To test for the personality traits of 'boldness' -- essentially an assertive curiosity -- the researchers planted unfamiliar foods on the edge of paths commonly used by baboon troops. These stimuli included hard-boiled eggs and small bread rolls dyed red or green. The research team then measured the time spent on investigating the new foodstuff, and whether they ate it, to determine a scale of boldness for members of the baboon troops.

"Our analysis is the first to suggest that bolder and shyer baboons are more likely to associate with others that share this personality trait," said Dr Guy Cowlshaw from the Zoological Society of London, senior author of the study. "Previous studies in other animals -- from chimps to guppies --

suggests that time spent in the company of those with similar personalities could promote cooperation among individuals.

"Why baboons should demonstrate homophily for boldness is unclear, but it could be a heritable trait, and the patterns we're seeing reflect family associations."

Perhaps surprisingly, says Carter, gender was not a particular obstacle to social interaction, with females preferring to groom



males. This is, in part, due to the obvious sexual engagements for breeding, but also as a tactic on the part of females to curry favor with particular males for the sake of their offspring. "Chacma baboon males will often commit infanticide, killing the babies of rivals. Female baboons try and get around this by being as promiscuous as possible to confuse the paternal identity -- so males find it harder to tell if they are killing a rival's offspring or their own," added Dr Carter.

"They will also try and form bonds with particular males in the hope that they will protect their offspring and let the babies forage in good places with them -- although males tend to be fairly lazy when it comes to this; it's up to the babies to follow the males to good food."

