

## Outside vs Inside.

The man was thinking about ageing through decades of change- not only had he aged, but he had experienced profound changes in society, not only in his day-to-day life, but also in his neighbors, nation, and globally.

The man had made the changes necessary to live a happy and productive life, no matter when or where he lived. That included living off-grid for nearly a decade, living in a luxury home while running a high-tech internet company for two decades, and finally living alone and writing novels for a decade plus. There were many other life experiences, such as raising two children as a single parent and going through three divorces. Still, those are, while mentionable, digressions from what his thoughts were invested in now.

The changes he was thinking of now, and the changes affecting him, were about the substance he found in people, and whether that substance was deeper than acquiring items of pleasure.

The man asked others when they thought enough acquisitions were enough, and frequently, he was met with an expression of confusion. Another part of his questioning was to ask others if their unquenchable desire for pleasure hid their lack of meaning in life.

These questions and more he had also asked himself during his decades-long introspection, and asking others never occurred to him that it might be an invasion of their privacy. The man had mental and spiritual paths he explored or travelled in, and he believed his paths were the same for others. But having lived a life unlike anyone he had met left him out of touch with people in

general. That wasn't important enough to change how he lived; he would rather be who he was than anyone he had ever met. He truly liked thinking his thoughts; the more he exposed himself to people, the more he wanted to be alone. It became not wanting to be alone but needing to be alone, despite truly liking others and enjoying their company. Sometimes he would feel exhausted after being with others, and other times he would vanish by not answering phone calls, texts, or emails.

This exposure was new when compared to his first four decades of existence. His first many decades were B.C., or Before Computers. He lived when a phone rang until the caller hung up, and before answering machines and cell phones. The man thought that, in many ways, he had lived before life had become automated, and before life had become infected with hordes of people preying on others for their belongings.

So, then the man stopped and asked aloud, "What am I trying to say? Every generation has probably felt like I do, from telegraph poles being changed to telephone poles, and that name then changed to Utility poles because of cell phones. No, progress has always been and always will be. Refrigeration was rolled out only to harm the ozone layer, so it was changed, and, over time, the ozone layer healed. Nuclear bombs were exploded in Nevada, but then radiation was discovered, so the practice was stopped. It's always been something", the man thought. He then dug deeper and found that 50 years ago, the population of the Earth was around 3.5 billion, whereas now it is more than 8.5 billion. "Is that what I'm trying to say? I feel trapped in a crowd of unreliable opinions?"

Again, he thought about what he was trying to say, and finally it struck him: "The world is literally on the porch of my life. Every time I open my door, and by opening my door I mean

using my smartphone, turning on the TV, or going onto the internet, the entire presence of opinions is there. Stupid, wise, educated, disingenuous, good and evil are all there. And I'm there too. I'm here with my facts, half-thought-out ideas, hopes and fears, and acquired biases and privileges. But almost every person I meet and speak to is influenced, many times even controlled by, their social media algorithms, providing the information they trust.

The man sighed deeply, yet his sigh was also in recognizing that he was crossing a finish line. For now, the finish line was merely crossing a line in a stage of life, and, with that crossing, a time to rest and prepare for the next phase of rampant change and population growth. Rampant change from people handing over their future to AI, from watching 8.5 billion people balloon to a number no one can imagine, and a future that only time will reveal. But," thought the man, "who will drive out the education stupor in people? Who will get them to understand that they are smarter than AI? AI's knowledge, as presented to the public on social media, is never original. It collects and reorganizes existing knowledge before regurgitating it. You would have known that if you were properly educated."

"So," the man thought, "who wants smart people versus dumb? Who writes the algorithms for AI, and what is their goal? Are algorithms written to make us slaves or rulers? To make us feel happy or anxious. To make us feel positive or negative. We play the social media information game without even knowing the rules!"

Written by Peter Skeels © 10-6-2025