

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Let's celebrate not commiserate

Our obsession with Y2K and its prophets of doom are obscuring the meaning of the word millennium.

The millennium, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English is a period of 1,000 years and has been associated with a passage from the Book of Revelation which prophesies Christ's reign of 1,000 years on earth. Secular and religious millenniasts both see it as a coming time of justice and happiness, secularists as a time of material comfort never before known.

And yet we know the measure of years in the calendar may be mistaken, that it may not really be 2,000 years since Christ was born. It could be out by three or four years.

Our calendar is based on the date of Jesus birth which it is certain occurred after the Roman year 747 and before the Roman year 749. Scholars say He was born between five and seven years before the usually accepted year 1 of the Christian era.

It was all the mistake of Scythian monk, Dionysius Exiguus, who drew up what he thought was an exact calendar of the Christian era, in the year 525. He calculated Christ was born in the Roman year 753 after the founding of Rome, obviously a mistake. Christ was five or six years old by that time because King Herod who ordered "the slaughter of the innocents" died in the Roman year 750.

For some reason the 1,000 years, or millennium, has been associated with a mystical bent that has terrorized people through the ages, some sects associating it with the end of the world rather than a time of justice and happiness. Although the New Testament expressly says no one knows the hour and time, it hasn't stopped some "prophets" from naming them, based on their conclusions. Invariably they have been wrong.

Some secular millenniasts, following in their footsteps, have tried to strike terror in the general populace by prophesying all kinds of chaos because computers weren't equipped to handle the year 2,000. People have been reacting by storing food and fuel in preparation for the wrath to come despite assurances from officials and their ilk that they have the solution well in hand.

It may well be our mistrust of those in higher places have replaced our common sense, fueled the terror associated with a date on the calendar. With natural disasters happening all around us in the form of floods, earthquakes and eruptions, the stage is set to forecast further misery.

We prefer rather to view the millennium as the start to a better world, an opportunity to rectify the mistakes of the past, a new beginning. The late Johnny Mercer, songwriter extraordinaire, penned our sentiments exactly with these words: "We gotta accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, don't mess with 'misery' (our word) in between."

To give 1,000 years more misery meaning is to endow it with powers that don't exist. Let's celebrate, not commiserate.

Briefly...

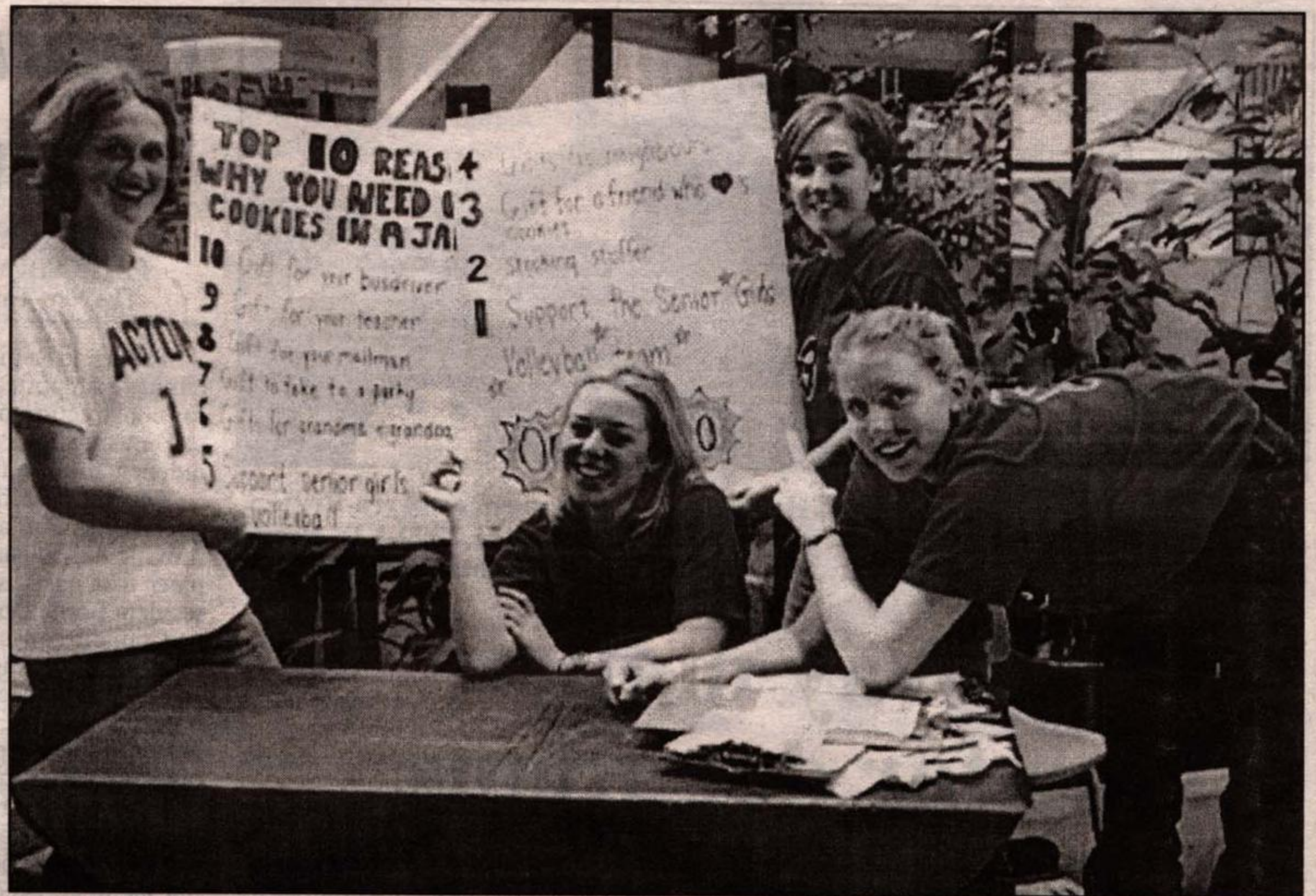
Senior citizens in Halton Region certainly don't share in the bonanzas being reported from other age groups. Statistics show that 53 per cent of senior citizens of Halton are living on \$10,000 a year or less.

★★★★

Here's a tip of the editorial chapeau to Bill Spielvogel who just completed chairing the firefighters' annual Santa Claus parade for the 18th time. By way of recognition he's being presented with a golden helmet and the title of honorary fire chief. The firefighters are honouring him but so are thousands of children over the years whose delight in the parade knows no bounds. This year's was another good one. See the story elsewhere in this edition of The New Tanner.

★★★★

For the second time within 10 days north Halton has experienced a death at level railway road crossings. The latest one occurred last Friday in Milton when a driver tried to circumnavigate warning signals, including crossing arms, and his vehicle was hit by an oncoming CP freight train. The warning signals were going on the earlier train/truck collision on the Fourth Line which resulted in the trucker's death. There's just no way to argue with an oncoming train. The motorist always loses.



EASY BAKE: Member of the senior girls' volleyball team at Acton High school have come up with a unique Christmas fund raiser – a jar containing the dry ingredients for one batch of cookies. Peddling the cookies at Saturday's craft sale at the school were, from left, Ruth Eddolls, Jen Shultz, Steph McKay and Rebecca Austin. – Frances Niblock photo

Toxic chemicals in environment


I don't live near a typical commercial farm, but the odds are that I still share my home with pesticides. While toxic chemicals like pesticides and herbicides were once thought to be confined to the areas near they were sprayed or manufactured, today they are showing up all over the world and that has many scientists concerned about how they might be affecting our health.

Pesticides like DDT, aldrin, toxaphene and others are a part of a family of chemicals known as Persistent Organic Pollutants. Other POPs include polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and a group of similar substances commonly referred to as dioxin, which tend to concentrate in animal fat. Many of these substances have been banned in North America, but continue to persist in the environment and are readily dispersed by the water and wind. Some, like DDT, are still used in developing nations. As a result, they have been found everywhere from the ocean depths, to ice in the high Arctic and in seemingly pristine lakes in the mountains of British Columbia. In fact, there are few areas on Earth that POPs cannot be found.

No one knows what effect these substances are having on human health. While they do not normally concentrate in our bodies enough to trigger a standard toxic effect, they may still be affecting us in other ways. For example, some POPs are believed to be endocrine disrupters, which means they mimic sex hormones in the body. This could interfere with our immune and nervous systems, and could also affect reproduction and development.

Even the unborn cannot escape POPs. Earlier this year, a team of American and Canadian scientists for the first time found pesticides and industrial chemicals in the amniotic

Science Matters
— by David Suzuki



fluid of unborn babies. Most worrisome was the discovery of DDE, a byproduct of DDT, which is thought to affect body's levels of testosterone, an important sex hormone. This could have adverse effects on unborn children, including the potential feminization of male foetuses.


Some experts point to evidence linking POPs with the increasing incidence of breast and other cancers, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. And earlier this year, researchers found that most forms of Parkinson's Disease are not hereditary. Instead, the disease is attributed to environmental factors - including possibly exposure to POPs like pesticides and herbicides such as the popular

glyphosate (Roundup).

The 1996 best-seller *Our Stolen Future* was the first popular book to draw widespread attention to hormone-disrupting chemicals and it stimulated new research on the subject. Unfortunately, a recent examination of existing research by the US-based National Research Council concluded that there is still not enough information on endocrine disrupters in the environment to make an accurate assessment of their risk to human health. Nevertheless, it did find that exposure to these chemicals can affect the development of the nervous system and found an association between developmental anomalies and endocrine disrupters in studies on wildlife.

For example, polar bears have recently been discovered in the Arctic exhibiting both male and female sex characteristics. Some scientists suggest this may have been caused by PCBs, which accumulate in the thick layer of fat that helps protect bears from the cold. Similarly, studies have linked the chemical Tributyltin (TBT), a marine paint additive, to changes in the sex characteristics of snails. Although banned for use on small boats, TBT levels in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet are still considered among the world's highest.

Clearly, more studies on the human health affects of POPs need to be done. We are ingesting these chemicals, perhaps on a daily basis, then passing them on to future generations through amniotic fluid and breast milk. It's surprising that pesticides and industrial chemicals that have been banned in North America decades ago still continue to haunt us today. It's also perplexing that we continue to create and liberally use these poisons when we know so little about their effect on our health and on other species.



On a quiet weekend there's roto-tillers, hedge clippers, weed whippers, leaf blowers, lawn mowers and snow blowers.

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