

Apollo anniversary brings Mars to fore

Twenty-five years ago today, Neil Armstrong set the first human foot upon the pockmarked surface of the moon.

Today, astronauts aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia are conducting experiments to determine how much gravity is necessary to grow plants in space.

Twenty-five years from now, where will we be?

This is not an easy question to answer. But before we get to that, we need to ask ourselves two more important questions: why should we go there, and who wants to come if we do?

For some, the exploration of space doesn't seem to deserve our attention anymore, now that the Cold War is over and satellites have already given us 500 TV channels and our pick of long-distance telephone providers.

Although many millions of dollars have been directed to the space program since the last Apollo mission in 1972, nothing so far has happened to compare with the achievement, foretold by President Kennedy in 1961, of "landing a man on the moon, and returning him safely to Earth." At least not in the eyes of the public.

Maybe there's a reason for that. NASA has suffered repeated setbacks since the Challenger disaster of 1986 put a damper on American exploration of space. The Hubble Space Telescope and the Galileo spacecraft have been hobbled by mechanical and design problems, and the \$42 billion Freedom space station has been hacked and redesigned so many times it may never get off the drawing board. As for the Mars Observer? Lost in space. Literally.

With NASA having such a dismal track record lately, it's hard to imagine why so many people have used the anniversary of the Apollo landing to clamor for another mission, this time to Mars.

NASA estimates in 1989 placed the cost of a manned Mars mission at \$400 billion, and the timeline at no less than 30 years.

Alternate plans for a Mars mission may revise the costs downward. A plan that doesn't include the costly space station would help. Manufacturing fuel on Mars, rather than ferrying it all the way there and back, might also help substantially.

But even then, the costs would be enormous. If the United States really thinks there is something to be gained from a manned Mars mission, then it ought to enlist the help of the rest of the world community.

America's old space nemesis, Russia, has the world's most powerful rocket, the Energiya. It also has by far the most experience with long-term space missions (several cosmonauts have remained in space for more than a year). The Europeans and the Japanese have been making strides in recent years. Why not take advantage?

The Apollo missions were designed, as much as anything else, to increase American prestige in the height of the Cold War, although science certainly profited as well.

But to pursue Mars on a similar basis — one motivated by national pride, rather than solid scientific justification — would be foolish. Cooperation will ease the financial burden and increase the chances for success.

If we do go to Mars, we better have a reason. And we better have help.



OPINION

'Mean people suck' and here's why



LIA SALICCIA

"Put a bra on!" yelled the guy I had just passed while I was riding my bike down the sidewalk.

Had I done anything to provoke this individual? No. Had I been unnecessarily rude while passing him? No, even though I had to ride really slowly behind him and call "On your left!" twice before the girl he was with nudged him and his rollerblades to the right so I could pass.

So what did I do to deserve his little commentary-on-wheels?

I wasn't wearing a bra. Which brings me to an important point: why do people have to be unnecessarily unkind to strangers and yell rude things at them? Why do people have to be so mean?

Just like the bumper sticker says, mean people suck.

While riding home, I thought of a million things I wanted to say and do to this guy. My first reaction was that I'd have liked to slam my fist into his stomach. But chances are I'd reserve my fists for bigger battles. I'm not a Mean Person. I wanted to ask the woman he was with if she felt embarrassed to be in public with this person. Most of all, I wanted to tell him that I had just gotten up and called my friend, who happened to be crying, and so I rushed out the door, braless, as soon as I could, to go comfort her.

But instead, I went with the thoughtful, witty approach: I flipped him my middle finger and rode on.

The phenomenon of meanness is widespread and not exclusively limited to the male gender. I remember one of my girl "friends" from middle school used to push me all the

time because I was weaker than she and she could laugh at me when I flew across the room into the wall.

Mean people are characterized by uncreative insults and verbal slams on the physical appearance of others.

Remember the Mean Kids in elementary school? They would expend all kinds of energy to put you through physical and emotional pain. And when you retaliated with a well-thought-out witticism that cut to the little creep's ego, they would strike back with a real zinger.

"You're fat," for example. Or perhaps, "shut up, crater face." Maybe the difference between boys and girls at that age is that more often, the girls would be mean behind your back or send evil little notes while the boys shouted embarrassing insults at you in front of the whole school.

I was whisked back down memory lane into the realm of Mean Kids when that guy yelled at me to put a bra on. Just minding my own business, feeling good for helping a friend, and the Bouncing Boob Police have to come along and ruin it all by telling me what I can and cannot do with my mammaries.

I don't mean to whine, I'm not going to let one little insult rule out all future happiness, but I ask you this. What prompts people to be mean to strangers?

Maybe it's a desire to look cool in front of your friends. One of my *Emerald* co-workers brings up this anecdote of Meanness. At the fragile age of 16, his shorts were pulled down by a guy in gym class in front of a bunch of girls. And it wasn't his moon that faced the girls, either. Did my co-worker do anything to provoke this Mean Kid? No.

Why do people have to be unnecessarily unkind to strangers and yell rude things at them? Why do people have to be so mean?

What explanation could there be? "He was just a dickhead."

I realize that at one time or another, we are all mean. One time I ripped up all of the sweet birthday and Christmas cards my mom ever gave me and put them in a box outside her bedroom door. That was mean. But it had context. Being mean to a rabidly rude waiter or waitress has context.

But being mean to a stranger just because you don't like their looks is not justifiable context for meanness. We should all be more mature than that by now. Just because somebody is ugly or weird-looking or dressed tackily or homeless or reeking of patchouli or, goddess forbid, NOT WEARING A BRA, is not an excuse to be mean to them.

Mean People, consider this: Someday you are going to strike out at the wrong person. You will say something mean to a total stranger, and that stranger will be a force to be reckoned with. They will mercilessly dish back something equal or greater in cruelty. And you know what? They will be smarter than you are.

Lia Saliccia is an associate editor for the Emerald.

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