



A little warming could be a good thing

I'VE BEEN watching and listening to the latest global warming crisis with a fair amount of skepticism, especially when it's couched with the idea that somehow man's efforts can save the earth. This skepticism was reinforced when reading a book by humorist writer Bill Bryson published in 2003 and entitled *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. The book tackles everything from the cosmos to the earth and life on earth and was written by a non-scientist who spent three years visiting with people in the know. Bryson gives his perspective in layman's language that makes it possible for someone like me to read it.

One chapter that was of particular interest to me was a chapter entitled "Dangerous Beauty." It was referring to the Yellowstone area that happens to be about 60 miles from my front door. Family vacations might come to mind with pleasant memories of hotpots, fumaroles, geysers, Old Faithful, grizzly bears, bison...and cameras. The reality is Yellowstone is a supervolcano with unprec-

edented power. There are literally no others like it. It has a molten magna chamber that is roughly eight miles thick and 45 miles across, and rises from 125 miles deep within the earth's crust. It is unique because it is continental rather than oceanic like the roughly 30 other active supervolcanoes in the world. Yellowstone has erupted at least 100 times in its 16.5-million-year history. About 2 million years ago, it erupted in a blast that was 2500 times as strong as Mt. St. Helens in the '80s and created a pit or cauldron of over 2 million acres that are essentially now Yellowstone Park. That force was equivalent to 10 million Hiroshima bombs. Think about that! Yellowstone erupts every 600,000 years on the average, and its last eruption hasn't occurred for 630,000 years.

The impact of Yellowstone erupting has been and will be felt in almost all states west of the Mississippi plus parts of Mexico and Canada. In fact, after one of its eruptions, Nebraska had an ash layer that was 10 feet thick, roughly a

thousand miles away from Yellowstone. Imagine the effects on climate that volcanic winter would have on the breadbasket of America. Do you think we would go into an ice age where glaciers would become the rule rather than the exception? In fact, scientists believe that the earth has experienced 17 severe ice ages in the last 2.5 million years. I assume something also caused the planet to diminish each ice age. Sampling of ice cores in Greenland also reveal that temperatures on our planet have swung up to 15 degrees in just 10 years. People are freaked now because we've seen a .7 degree C. rise in the last century. The truth is that natural forces have caused some very cataclysmic changes in our climate throughout the age of the earth.

As if all this talk about Yellowstone isn't depressing enough, Bryson's book talks about earthquakes, asteroids, and comets, the earth's orbit pattern, and many other solar system nuances that could have deleterious effects on life as we know it. The interesting part is that there really is no safe place anywhere on the planet that couldn't experience some sort of natural catastrophe. Scientists and their computer models cannot hope to predict the interaction of all these natural events with the earth's climate. A few things became obvious to me as I worked my way through this book.

We don't know as much as we think we do. Science doesn't agree about many things and are often specula-

tive about what they know. Discovering the truth is often like putting a giant puzzle together where you don't even have all the pieces yet.

We are living in a bubble right now with opinions about our planet not based on the actual development of it. In fact, mother nature has been cold and cruel to its inhabitants, not warm and cuddly. Bryson makes a very profound statement when he says, "We live in a world that doesn't altogether seem to want us here."

Humans are very presumptive of their importance in the grand scheme of things. In fact, it seems remarkable to me that we are actually here, with all the things that have happened to our planet.

So here I sit, looking towards Yellowstone from my office window. It's like looking down the barrel of the biggest gun known to man, multiplied by about 10 million. It doesn't depress me at all, because there is not a thing that can be done about it. Each day is a gift, and if we worry about everything, we miss the meaning of life.

If you want to lessen your carbon footprint, do it because you want to save money, or because you don't want to make Exxon-Mobil richer, or because there is a better way, or because you don't want to buy weapons for the people trying to kill you. Don't do it because you're going to save the planet! Sorry, Al.

—*Merle Adams*