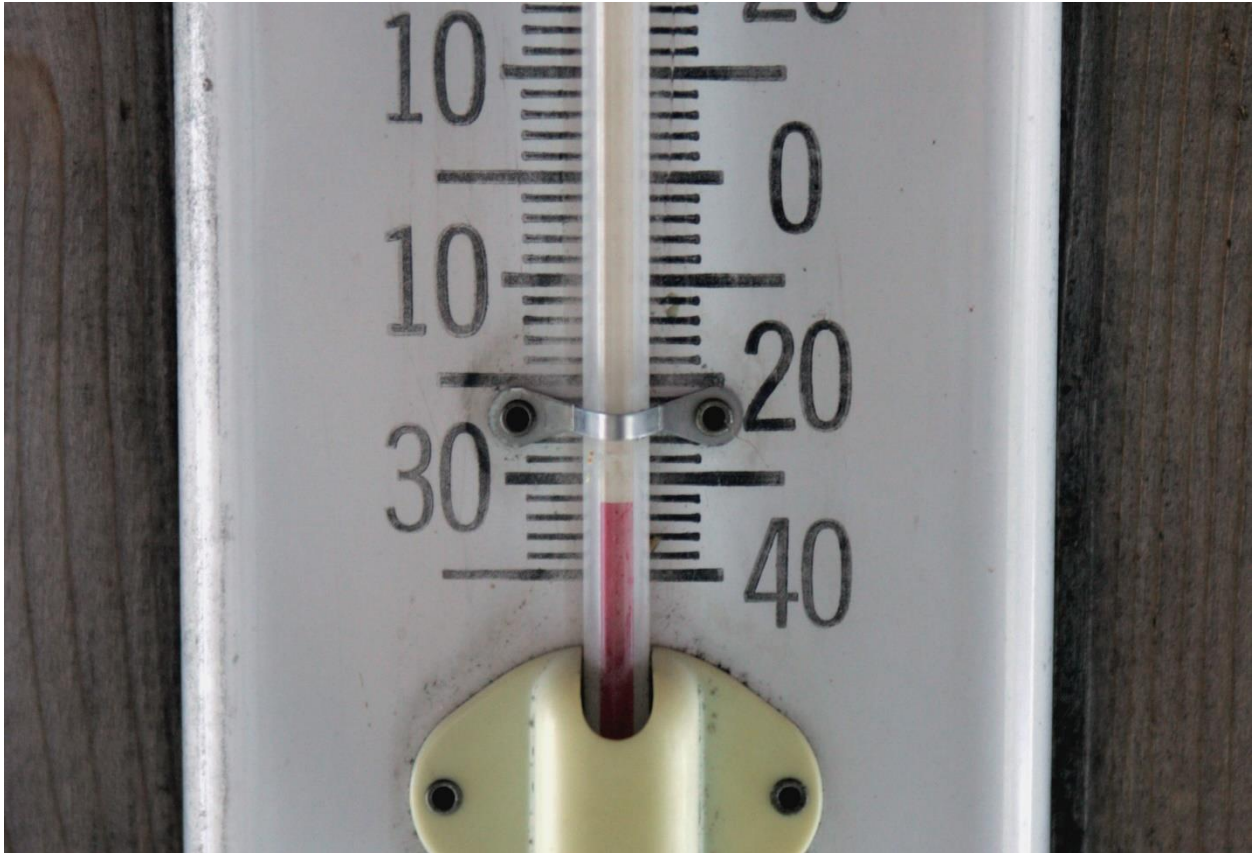


It's Been Frigid



Welcome to the end of February. Have you been able to keep warm?

For all my friends not living in northern climates, this may be a strange sentence to start my blog with. But some of you may think you are not north enough to worry about really cold weather and wondered how it got so cold in your home town. A day or two ago, it was not only snowing in Las Vegas, but also Tucson, Arizona. What is going on?

Up here in Calgary Alberta, we have spent most of February somewhere around -20°C (a little south of 0°F for those more familiar with Fahrenheit). That's cold. It broke the chain spindle on my garage door opener and it was too cold to fix. Then the cold smoked the battery in my Ford Focus because I was forced to park it on the street. Here's looking to March being a more milder version of winter. On average, however, March is one of the months with the heaviest snow fall in Calgary. Here's hoping I won't be shovelling in sub zero temperatures.

Climate has had a very large influence on human history. The climate was warmer back around 1000 AD. I figure that was the reason Vikings started taking to the high seas towards Greenland and North America as opposed to just across the North Sea to rape and pillage across England and France is because of the warmer climate. The settlement they established in Greenland died out a little after 1300, about the same time climate went colder again. That was called the Little Ice Age that lasted about 300 years. People could skate on the Thames River in London.

Columbus may have found the Caribbean in 1492, but no one started populating the north end of North America until 1600, when climate began to warm again. Throughout human history, we expanded across the globe during warm times and contracted during the cold times. As technological advances were made, the contractions became smaller and smaller until today where we bundle up and handle the cold, unless you winter in Florida like a lot of Canadians.

Even single cold winters have caused major upheavals in the human experience. The winter of 1788-89 was unusually cold and early, lowering crop yields in France. The lack of food was one of the main flash points that started the French Revolution and began 25 years of war across Europe. People may grumble about a king, but generally stay loyal until that king can no longer feed them. Hitler was unlucky to have invaded Russia in 1941 only to have his army stalled by one of the colder winters on record six months later. Imagine, there are some winters colder in Russia than "normal".

I believe we are at the beginning of a new climate cycle. For me, there was a distinct warming change that occurred about 1980 in Ontario, Canada. That was the same year Mount St. Helen's erupted. Coincidence? Hard to say, Generally, ash in the air should cool the planet. But it has taken almost thirty years for the trend to be determined and for extreme weather to appear. Hotter summers. Brutally cold winters.

Is humanity responsible? That's the big debate. Personally, I think we may be enhancing a regular 300 year cycle of nature, but in terms of burning fossil fuels, I'm more concerned about all the other toxic chemistry that comes with burning fuels as opposed to focusing on carbon dioxide. Basically, carbon dioxide as a villain makes it easier to promote green energy projects. You start talking about all the other toxic emissions that no one has heard of and the complexity just has people tune out. But there is one problem no one wants to talk about.

The biggest single source of carbon dioxide on the planet is us, breathing. Eight billion people and counting, each expelling carbon dioxide with every breath. How do you solve that?

I believe we are at the beginning of a natural warming cycle. It comes with extreme weather. I also believe we should not be contributing extra to it, but we need more time to move away from fossil fuels. Just cutting oil production off and going wind and solar is an ideal which is not very practical in the short term. Those energy sources are just not ready to supply all our energy needs. The economic upheaval of cutting off oil cold turkey could very well start the next violent war on this planet.

Now there's an idea for a new novel...