

I Just Have **1** Question

So, Who Wants to Go First?



by Doug Carpenter

O.K. Why is it that I always see the *same hands*?

Actually, I'd honestly be surprised if I saw *anyone* jumping up to volunteer for *that*. Because there aren't very many things that people will go *further* out of their way to avoid than being the *first* one to do — well — pretty darn near *anything*.

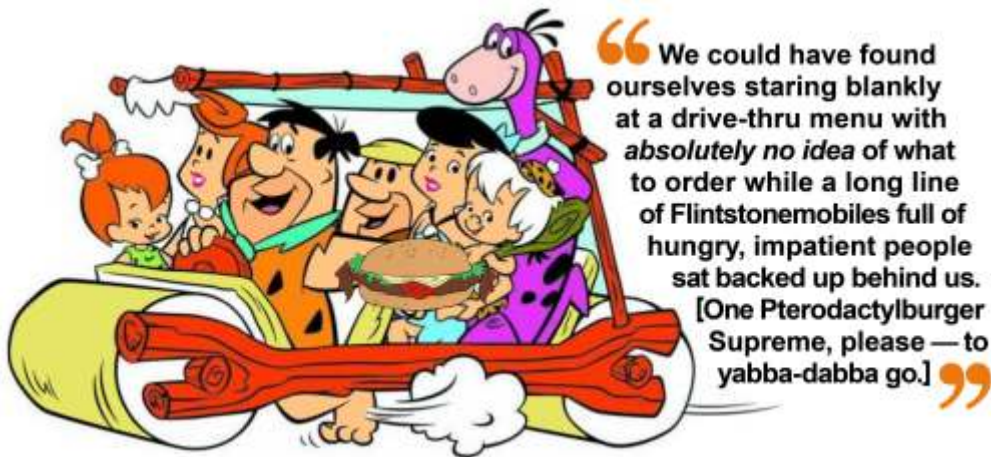
And I'm not talking here just about the seemingly-infinite list of *specific* activities the mere *thought* of having to perform turns otherwise perfectly secure grownups into self-conscious, wish-they-could-make-themselves-invisible teenagers

[...as if that weren't so transparently predictable that the other kids wouldn't see right through it.]

For example, the popularity of "Unaccustomed as I am..." as an all-purpose excuse to get you off the public speaking hook tells us that getting up in front of a large audience apparently scares the pants off a whole *lot* of people.

Interestingly, many of these are the *same* people who show virtually zero reluctance to share their numerous, passionately-held opinions with smaller groups [...in sharp contrast with the *rest* of humanity, who have *just* as many opinions but are equally unaccustomed to keeping their mouths *shut* about them in public.]

Which I suppose is to be



expected, since — as I'm sure you'll all remember from your school days — there *was* always that *one* kid in the class whose insistent, *pick me*-pleading hand could consistently be counted on to shoot straight up [...and their neck *out*...] when everybody else would be looking for a desk to duck under.

The unavoidable fact is that — *regardless* of the challenge that's on the table — someone, somewhere *has* to go *first*. If they *didn't*, nothing would ever happen, and the world would never change. But *ours* would almost certainly be *very* different.

What if, for instance, our distant ancestors had never left wherever it was that they started out and embarked on the fateful multigenerational journey that

led us all — for better or worse — to where we are *now*?

Think about it. The news headlines from the other side of the world that horrify you today *could've* been about *you* and *your* family. [Although, in a very real and global sense, they still *are*, aren't they?]

And imagine if no one in our species' long ago past had ever eyed something growing or scurrying by in the forest primeval and bravely — not to mention potentially *fatally* — said, "Hey. *That* looks interesting. I think I'll try *eating* it."

We could have found ourselves staring blankly at a drive-thru menu with *absolutely no idea* of what to order while a long line of Flintstonemobiles full of

Continued on Page 13



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Continued from Page 12

hungry, impatient people sat backed up behind us. [One Pterodactylburger Supreme, please — to yabba-dabba go.]

Looking back, however, mankind's intermittent hesitation to act rather than take the initiative, as risky as it might've been, doesn't appear to have derailed the evolution of human intelligence *too* badly — at least so far.

Granted, the invention of the glow-in-the-dark yo-yo wasn't exactly a quantum leap from carving the first wheel out of stone. But aside from spray cheese and the equally-unappetizing spray-on hair, our record for innovation is otherwise pretty solid.

This assumes, of course, that we weren't *supposed* to be a lot further along in the expansion of our social enlightenment and fast food selection. [An order of Brontosaurus nuggets really *would* hit the spot right about now, though.]

After we're done with our mid-column snack, perhaps it would be best if we focused on conquering our all-too-human *fears*, thereby hopefully improving the world's chances of evolving into something better than it is today.

I can't imagine, though, that some of you aren't thinking that *anything* would be better than the way things currently are. And truth be told, you *wouldn't* be entirely wrong. Or for that

matter entirely *right*, either.

Because the terrifying but ultimately indemnifying reality is that — at least a little if not a lot — we're all *both*, all the time. And if we're *lucky*, it'll *never* be *any other way*.

Think about the lifelong litany of routine risks you take without any way of knowing how they'll turn out, the most harrowing and potentially ego-crushing kind often being performed in front of a live and not-always-kind audience.

Like the time in gym class when you nervously had to try to make it all the way up to the top of the dreaded, ceiling-high climbing rope — a situation in which no middle schooler in their right mind would *ever* offer to go first. Fortunately, this is where those annoying “class hand raisers” came in really *handy*.

That's because if you *let* them, you *knew* that *they* would volunteer. All you had to do was *wait*. [And don't worry. If their climbing rope grip ever slipped, their overinflated sense of self-worth was *bound* to break their fall.]

Most of the *biggest* risks we take, however, aren't broadcast quite so publically. More often, they're like programs carried exclusively on our lives' premium “Personal Relationships” channel. [Seriously. Spring for the cable package upgrade. It's worth every penny.]

Some of them, in fact, aren't as much visualizable adventures as they are audible — if occasionally ill-advised — acts of self-expression. They consist simply of you, opening your mouth, and saying what's on your mind [...something you do all the time, right? So how

dangerous could it *be*?]

Well, you find *that* out quickly enough — particularly when it involves boldly “speaking truth to power.” And frankly, who needs a good earful of that more than *them*? [Not that they're necessarily going to *hear* you or grasp the importance what you say. But try anyway.]

Or you could be bravely — and quite probably vulnerably — making the conciliatorily gesture of being “the first to admit you were *wrong*,” [...in the process making you the increasingly-rare “bigger person,” which these days is no small thing.]

Or, you might very possibly be taking the *scariest* chance a person can take — being “the first one to say ‘*I love you*.’” It's

not like you *have* to say it first. Sometimes, though, what you feel inside simply makes the decision *for* you. You just have to hope you don't end up being the one who says it *last*.

But try not to let that give you second thoughts. From my experience, anytime an opportunity *that important* and *that real* presents itself, it's *always* a risk worth taking.

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Throughout *After 50's* first 16 years, veteran WNY writer and columnist Doug Carpenter regularly shared his wry generational observations with readers as *Everyboomer*. He has now returned to write a uniquely-named new monthly humor/opinion column called *I Just Have 1 Question* — which he says he'll ask and then bravely try to answer... without, he fervently hopes, looking excessively foolish in the process. [We wish him luck.]

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