

TRIP TO MOON CHANGES VIEW OF WORLD

BEAUMONT ENTERPRISE

February 4, 2019

I used to celebrate each new year by pondering what lay ahead. Now, as I struggle to remember where I left my glasses or parked my car, my focus has shifted more to where I've been than where I'm going. But such a perspective is not all bad.

I was reminded of this recently while watching a Public Broadcasting documentary about the three astronauts of Apollo 8 who were hurled into lunar orbit on Christmas Eve 1968. Their mandate was to map the moon's far side while testing new technologies needed to put a man on the surface.

The irony of Apollo 8 was that its feats of engineering have been overshadowed by one iconic photograph taken by the crew —not of the moon ahead, but the earth behind.

The image was captured by astronauts Jim Lovell, Frank Borman and Bill Anders, all combat pilots, as they reemerged from the far side on their first orbit. The view that crept across their porthole was the bleak lunar horizon, cratered and pockmarked like a no-mans-land of World War I.

But that image would soon be eclipsed by a fragile blue and white marble cresting peacefully over the moon's vista — man's first view of an "Earthrise." The crew's perception of Earth would never be the same.

Lovell later commented, "The lunar flights (gave) you a correct perception of our existence. You look back at Earth from the moon, and you can put your thumb up to the window and hide the Earth behind your thumb. Everything you've ever known is behind your thumb. ... "It was an indelible perspective of how infinitesimal we are in the infinity of space.

It seems the closer we are to our planet, the less clearly we can see the kinship among us. With each mile we venture away, our perception broadens and we see more rather than less of who we are — and who we can be.

When we look at the famous Earthrise photograph, we can see an amalgam of our humanity, the places we hold dear, like where we were born, where we first discovered romance, where our hearts were broken, where we met our true love. We also share them with every other viewer, and they with us.

The interrelationship of these very personal experiences binds us together more powerfully than any political philosophies or military alliances. The Earthrise reminds us that we are all in this together. We cannot save the planet unless we first take care of one another.

Like the astronauts learned on Apollo 8, the future of our planet and those with whom we share it, can best be preserved by looking back, from all points of view, at our commonalities, not our differences. Perhaps there is still time.

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche understood the importance of perception when he wrote, "And those who were seen dancing, were thought to be crazy, by those who could not hear the music."

Malcolm Gibson
Copyright 2019
All rights reserved