

PERSPECTIVE

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Taking a walk with my dog the other day, I stopped by a park, one with a playground, since my niece was with me.

It was school holiday season, so the area was packed with children. Naturally, with a fluffy golden retriever by my side, I was soon surrounded by kids wanting to pet my dog.

One thing led to another, and before I knew it, Pasta (my dog) and I had been roped into playing with some of the kids.

First it was over to the swing set, where my brash young niece issued me a challenge: "Bet you can't swing as high as me!", she belted out for all to hear.

Never one to back down from a taunt, especially one so publicly and brazenly issued, I accepted said challenge and immediately hopped on the swing next to her, entrusting Pasta to one of the munchkin spectators.

I figured that my substantially greater weight would be an advantage, enabling me to generate considerably more acceleration than my diminutive companion, thereby allowing me to show my superior swinging skills and maintain my playground dignity.

Unfortunately, I didn't take into account the low height of the swings. My legs hit and dragged across the ground, hampering my world-record swing-height attempt and producing a gaggle of giggles from the accumulated audience.

Undeterred by this temporary setback, I immediately accepted the next dare, which was to see who could stay longer on the merry-go-round-style contraption that you stand on while other people push you in circles.

Perched on either side of the thingamajig (I can't for the life of me remember what it's called), we held on tightly as people around us pushed.

Such a test of wills the playground has probably never seen. For a while, it looked as if we might be there all morning, since neither of us was willing to give in. Suddenly, however, my niece jumped off, wobbled tenuously with floppy noodle-legs...then threw up.

I helped her over to one of the benches, where we sat for a bit and watched other kids play.

It was there that I had one of those "eureka" moments...when I suddenly realised what had been bothering me for quite some time.

Caring for our environment and doing as much as we can to conserve natural resources is a wonderful thing. I think it's fair to say that the environmental movement has truly taken root during my lifetime, and I'm happy and proud to have done (and to be doing) my part to preserve our natural heritage.

What dawned on me that summer morning though, was that too much of a good thing can be a bad thing.

Playing with my niece was a lot of fun, but somewhere around the 300th revolution, we crossed a line and my niece got sick. Puke-green sick.

In the context of the marine environment, we've done one too many revolutions, so to speak, in many cases.

To take but one example, human-cetacean interactions (like swimming with dolphins, whales, etc.) is effectively banned in many countries.

Having been in the water with lots of cetaceans, I just don't get it. I've literally taken hundreds of people into the water to see dolphins and whales, and from the expressions of delight, squeals of excitement and repeated "thank you"s, I know that letting people see and experience things for themselves is the best way to instill a sense of caring and responsibility.

Restrictions and bans are sometimes necessary, and usually implemented with the best of intentions, but going too far means that the concept of conservation will remain just that...an abstract concept, as opposed to something tangible and heartfelt.

I suppose the point is that the growing trend toward banning activities (dolphin swims, shark feeding, etc.) may not necessarily be the most prudent or constructive course of action.

In the long run, letting my niece throw up was no doubt much better than banning her from the playground...even if I had a heck of a time explaining the puke stains to her mom.

Until next time, happy diving! ☺