

Technology transforms us

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SUNDAY MORNING WITH ...

After an unusually strong rain one night in 1985, the basement of my childhood home in Skokie, Ill., completely flooded. As we slept that night, water rose from floor to ceiling in the 500-square-foot recreational dungeon, creeping even onto the dark-green mosaic vinyl flooring and tan and black deep shag area rug of the den on next level of the house.

The fetid, sewage-tainted water totally devoured a collection of unsat-upon 1970s-era furniture, the damage to which matters only because otherwise the pieces would certainly now be prized possessions in the home of some retro hipster. And, arguably the loss of the bumper pool and ping pong tables was negligible since they had gone largely unplayed with by my brothers and me for years. But the casualty with the biggest impact, the one that could never be undone, was the destruction of our family photos.

Few images of me as a child survive to this day, most having dissolved in that putrid stew. The ones that remain, I have scanned and uploaded to Facebook for safe-keeping. I recently read that each minute on the Internet, more than 6,600 pictures are saved to Flickr and 25 hours of video content are uploaded to YouTube. It will take more than unusually heavy precipitation to destroy our memories from now on. I have taken and stored thousands of digital images of my children. So decades from now, they will be able to easily show



Kenny Lapins, age 7

their great-grandchildren what life was like way back at the turn of the 21st century.

Digital photography and cloud computing are just the latest examples of the transformational technology that is affecting our evolution. I believe within each of us is a spark of the eternal force that created the Universe. It's what moves the body and converts the brain into an organ that can think. For the most part, this immortal spark is trapped inside us even though it is a drop of all-knowing omnipotence. But technology allows us to unleash it.

Legendary guitarist Steve Vai said, "The level of achievement that we have at anything is a reflection of how well we were able to focus on it; because the only thing that's holding you back is the way you're thinking." I saw him deliver this line in a video posted to YouTube, incidentally. I would take that one step further and say that the only thing holding us back from unleashing the full power of the infinite spark within us is the will to do so. Over time, invention after invention, we humans are overcoming



Kenny Lapins' column runs every four weeks on Sunday as part of "Sunday Morning With ..."

our corporeal nature.

We aren't omnipresent, but I can see what it's like anywhere on Earth right now with a simple Google search. Even more, our reach extends all the way to the edge of the Solar System. We receive data from the Voyager 1 spacecraft on the conditions of interstellar space, and the Hubble telescope shows us images even farther than that. So if we keep transforming ourselves with new technologies, eventually we will be able to be everywhere.

We aren't omniscient, but I carry the sum of human knowledge in my pocket on my smartphone. Our journey to know more and more is what gets us out of bed each morning.

We aren't omnipotent, but we can create and destroy life. We can truly move mountains and reverse the flow of mighty rivers. We can hurl objects millions of miles, where once we could only throw a spear a few yards.

We aren't eternal, but certainly our spirit can live on after we are gone in the hearts and minds of those who loved us. We can create art that speaks our passions long after our lungs can exhale breath.

That leaves one ageless trait that would make us most resemble the eternal spark within us: benevolence. As our technology transforms us, our free will can either be the trigger that causes our limitless potential to explode into fiery hate or it can be the instrument that refines our power into a song of great joy.

Each of us has to make the decision. How will we channel our power? Will we be selfish or selfless? The potential for complete benevolence is within each of us. If we aren't putting goodness into the world, we are corrupting the most precious thing we have. Will we teach the children we create to love or to hate? Will we work to bring art or misery to others? Will we build or break down? It's for each of us to decide.

And we need to make the decision soon, lest we find ourselves awash in another flood: one of our own making. A rancid soup of hate and ignorance that annihilates all we have done and closes the door forever on our future.