



Now for The News . . .

by: [Andrew K Jacobson](#)

The news has been dreary for some time now, and September has not been friendly in the recent past. Under all that gloom, it is easy to forget that there is a lot of good news out there:

Accounting for population growth, violent crime is down 48 percent over the last 20 years. The [FBI](#) recorded 1,926,017 violent crimes in 1993. In 2012, the last complete years records are currently available, there were only 1,214,462, even though the population grew over 21% during that time. Homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault – all down. Every violent crime is a tragedy for the victim and the victim’s family and friends, but more than 700,000 fewer violent crimes a year is unmitigated good news.

Drunk driving deaths have declined more than 50 percent since 1982. That’s 30 people every day who are not killed by a drunk driver. Thank you, [Mothers Against Drunk Driving](#).

Virtually every person over the age of five has immediate access to information - something unimaginable 30 years ago. If Siri or Google Plus on your smartphone cannot understand your question, a search engine is still available to track down what you want to know. Beats an out-of-date encyclopedia any day. Unfortunately, the [Cliff Clavins](#) of the world still exist.

Our air is cleaner than ever. In the Los Angeles area – long considered the worst of the worst – the air is much cleaner than it was fifty years ago, even though the population has tripled since then. Vehicle-related pollutants are only two percent – 2%! – of what they were in the 1960s, according to [Ilana Pollack](#), a scientist at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences. As someone who grew up in the smog of 1970s Los Angeles, the lack of the brown stain in the air when in the Southland is a welcome change. We had more than 100 stage 1 air alerts every year; there has only been one (in 2003) in the LA area since 1998. Breathing clean air is definitely not overrated. (For those who claim it was better before cars, try living with horses for awhile. You remove the pollution with a shovel.)



America is importing far less oil from unstable regions than 20 years ago. The United States is getting a lot more oil from [domestic sources](#) like Texas and North Dakota, and from North American neighbors, Canada and Mexico, while consumption is modestly declining. The US now produces more oil domestically than it imports, which hasn't been true since the mid-1990s. As of 2013, [fuel economy](#) of US-sold vehicles improved more than 19 percent since 2007, meaning that [fuel consumption](#) by US drivers has declined 11 percent in less than a decade. The less oil the US uses, the less money it sends to those who do not share our values.

While American universities are well-known for hosting the top students from around the world, [Americans](#) studying abroad have tripled in the last two decades. Encountering new cultures on their home field enables American students to be better workers later, when they have jobs dealing with those cultures. As foreign students (who have been increasing at 20% annual rates) prepare to take exams so that they can study in American universities, they are studying the foundations of [American democracy](#), like the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Regardless of whether they are studying or staying here, those values will stick with them.

Infant mortality rates have plunged around the globe, but even in the United States, it has averaged a decline of more than [2.5% per year](#) for the period between 1937 and 2007. In 1937, more than 55 of every 1000 children born in the United States died; in 2007, that rate was just 6.9. The 2.5% annual decline is for both whites and blacks in the United States. Yes, there is still work to do, but this is pure wonder.

Not coincidentally, teenage pregnancy, abortion, and birth rates are at [new lows](#). Whether this is because of more contraceptive use, more care by the young (both male and female), or just the MTV show "16 and Pregnant" [http://www.mtv.com/shows/16_and_pregnant/] showing the sacrifices of parenthood, this means a higher proportion of infants are being born to those in a position to take good care of them.



At the other end of the spectrum, life expectancy in the United States is continuing to increase. In [1900](#), a US male could expect to live 46.3 years; a woman, 51.08 years. In 1960, average male life expectancy was 66.6 years, for females, it was 73.1 years. In [2008](#), it was 78.0 years for men, 80.5 years for women. The virtuous circle: longer lives equals more grandparents; more grandparents means happier children.

These good news stories lack the drama of conflict. Whether it is late night explosions in the Middle East, natural disasters in places you've never seen before, or the latest televised car chase, it is easy to believe that things are going to hell in a hand basket. The things that are getting better lack the immediate drama but are making lives better all the same.