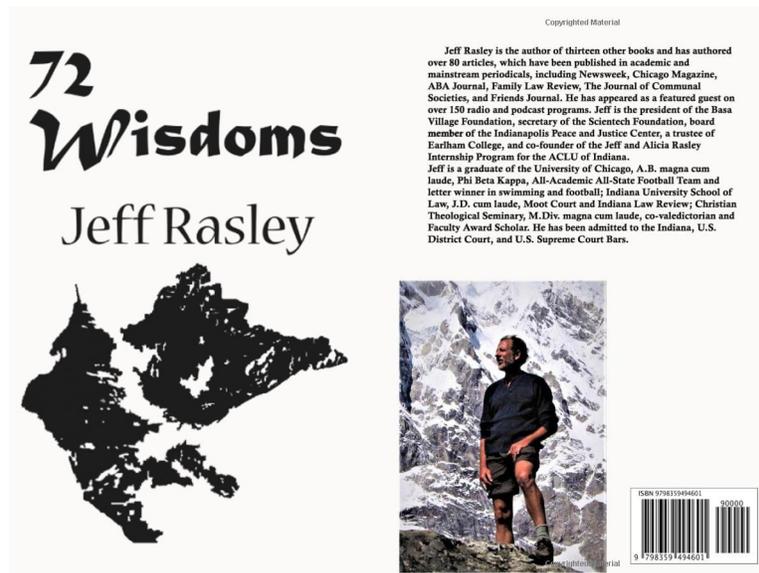


**Excerpt from**  
***72 Wisdoms: A practical guide to make life more meaningful,***  
**by Jeff Rasley**

To my readers: Jeff Rasley was a classmate of mine at the University of Chicago, back in the land before time. (We were both in the undergraduate class of 1975.) He is a [Renaissance man](#) who has been a poet, fiction and nonfiction author, social activist, athlete (yes, the University of Chicago has a football team), adventurer, lawyer, and philanthropist. He has more recently turned to philosophy and, after reading some of my optimistic/futuristic articles, contacted me to say that he included a comment about my work in his most recent book, [72 Wisdoms](#). Here it is. -Larry



Rasley's book can be found at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/BoBJYGHZCM> in both paperback and Kindle formats.

## 32. Healthy Optimism

### Postscript

If the daily barrage of bad news keeps tempting you toward pessimism, a reality check with facts about how the world is on a beneficial trajectory in certain areas might help stiffen your spine. The pandemic slowed some of these positive trends, and global warming is still increasing, but a fellow UChicago alumnus and economist, Laurence Siegel, opened his July 2022 blog Unknown Knowns with: [“To Hell in a Handbasket? No Way, Says Johan Norberg.”](#) Larry's blog [post] is primarily a review of [Norberg's 2017 book, \*Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future\*](#). Larry supports his conclusion that we are not going to hell in a handbasket with the following data from Norberg's book (Larry provides 2022 updates of the data in brackets):

- In 1981, “extreme” poverty — living on an income of \$1.90, or less, per person per day in today's money — characterized 52% of the world's population. Today, the comparable figure is 12% of a much larger population. [2022 update: 8.9%]

- Global life expectancy at birth has more than doubled since 1900. It is now 71 years, which is higher than what it was in the United States in 1965. [2022 update: 72.98 years. That’s a lot of change in a short time.]
- The environment is better adapted to human life. “In 1981,” writes Norberg, “half of the world’s population had access to safe water. Now, 91 percent do. On average, that means that 285,000 more people have gained access to safe water every day for the past 25 years.”

Larry continues,

This is not cherry picking. Practically every economic, social, and environmental indicator is in a long-term uptrend, if not an accelerating one. Norberg does not deny that bad things still happen — and I devote some attention to them toward the end of this article — but in his narrative they recede into near-insignificance when compared to both the long-term and the recent pace of improvement. Political freedom, while losing a few battles, is gradually winning the war: in 1950, 31% of the world’s people lived in electoral democracies; today, 63% do. Violence is down, Norberg argues, and in many countries equality under the law has been extended to women, blacks, and gays. [Some backsliding since 2017.]

Norberg’s book chronicles the ... startling and unexpected gift of prosperity, safety, and good health to a majority of the world’s people.

Larry summed up the historical trajectory of material progress and improvements in the quality of life since the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution in his October 17, 2022 newsletter this way:

Three dollars a day was the level of living that almost all of humanity experienced until the 1700s in northwestern Europe and eastern North America, and until 1870 or more recently in the rest of the world. Under those circumstances we would often starve; we would, on average, die in our thirties; and women would have to bear a dozen children in order that three survive to adulthood.



By almost every measure, we are better off today than ever before, even if on a day-to-day basis life sometimes seems a bit rocky. Read Larry’s blog at <http://www.larrysiegel.org/writing>.