

COMMENTARY *By* **DR. DHANPAUL NARINE**

We Can Make a Difference!

As we begin another year, the resolutions may become harder to follow. But rest assured that each of us has the power to make a difference. We can each do good and in the process change lives for the better. We hear the wonderful words of inspiration from some of the leading thinkers of our time and we are imbued with the notion that we can lift mountains if we put our minds to it. It is not rocket science to think that one person can change the world if that person applies him or herself to the task ahead.

Making a difference is about creating changes that will benefit others. In other words, even though there may be challenges one should hold a firm course and not be distracted. Mahatma Gandhi has said that we must be the change that we want to see. The anthropologist Margaret Mead has stated that, 'never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'

Leo Tolstoy says, 'everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing himself.' Change has to come from within and it starts with the individual. Dr. Martin Luther King makes the point that we must stay vigilant and have the courage to face the challenge of change. He also believes in the power of the written word. King says, 'If you want to change the world pick up your pen and write.'

Many writers have left their imprint for us to treasure and to make their own little waves across the world. Nelson Mandela was influenced by the words and actions of Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, among others. By the time he was 12 Chavez had attended eight schools because of the hard-

ships of farmwork in California. But Chavez went on to become a national hero in America and an inspiration to Latinos everywhere. Mandela believed in the power of education. He often said that education is the most powerful weapon that one can use to change the world.

Mother Teresa said that once a person has the requisite information he or she can, 'cast a stone across the waters and create many ripples.' But change comes with a price. It can cause one to be hesitant and may even lead to fear. There are so many people that prefer the status quo, want things to be just the way that they are, and are happy to roll along with the events of the day. As Dostoyevsky says, 'taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most.'

President Barack Obama describes change in a Gandhi-like manner. He is of the view that we must seize the opportunity to act now and not to wait for something to happen later. According to Obama, 'Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change we seek.'

If we look around we will find that there are many individuals

that are making a difference in their own humble ways. They are a constant source of inspiration. There are also a number of strategies that that one can employ on their own to make a difference. There are things you can do in less than an hour to make positive changes and some of them are environmentally related.

The first is that you can avoid littering. Pick up after yourself and

portation, one's eating habit can lead to significant changes. Scientists and dieticians have argued that by eating less meat and eating more vegetables, and fruits and grains, can help to protect the habitat. In simple terms the raising of animals for food produces tons of greenhouse gas emissions than the growing of plants.

The fact is that when one raises animals for food it takes up large

the environment. The production of plastics requires an intensive degree of time and effort. It consumes natural resources and when it is dumped it becomes an eyesore in the landscape. It is estimated that globally about a trillion plastic bags are dumped annually and this works out to be at an average of a million bags a minute. This does tremendous damage to the environment. Plastics do not only block



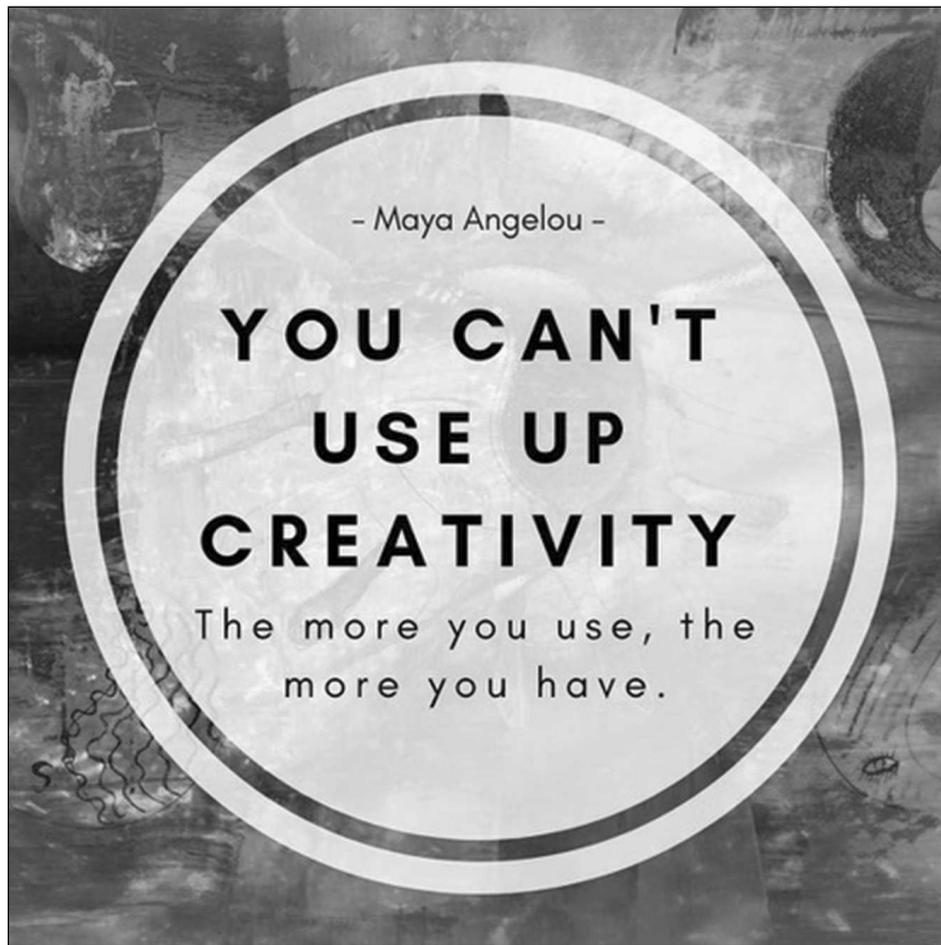
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water usage.

It is a common practice to leave the tap running to get the water warm. Some persons also flush more than is necessary and this too causes water to be wasted. The lesson here is to be responsible and moderate. Turn off a light or lower it if possible to use less energy. In the winter, when heated rooms are left open, energy escapes. The same applies to the summer, when the air conditioners in several rooms, pump cool air through open windows.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, "if every household in the United States replaced just one regular incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent light bulb, it would prevent 90 billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, the equivalent of taking 7.5 million cars off the road." Consumers would also save money in the long run for using an approved fluorescent bulb.

There are several persons that are working in various parts of the world to bring about change in their communities. They go unheralded and unannounced. But their efforts are important and we salute these individuals and encourage them to continue with their efforts. One small change can have the lasting ripple effect that can impact many lives.



if everyone else does we will have a cleaner planet. The schools need to teach this simple truth. Secondly, it pays to leave the car at home and take public transportation at times. There is also the option of carpooling or walking when possible. These save energy and help to preserve the environment. According to one publication, 'people who use public transportation are healthier than those who don't.' There is also the question of saving money that could be put to better use.

Apart from trans-

areas of land and water. But there are other costs as well and they include the cost of grain and fuel. One report concludes that, 'every year in the United States alone, 80 percent of all agricultural land, half of all water resources, 70 percent of all grain, and one-third of all fossil fuels are used to raise animal food.' The conclusion is that, 'by adopting a vegan diet it does more to reduce global warming than switching to a hybrid car.'

What about plastics? There is little doubt that plastics are harmful to

the canals and rivers but also destroy marine life. The alternative is of course reusable plastic bags that would ultimately reduce pollution.

These are all practical steps that one can take to protect the environment. But there is the urgent need to conserve on the use of water. Many scientists predict that there will come a time when we may run out of water. This will cause conflicts between nations, and even war, bearing in mind that two-thirds of the planet is covered with water. Each person can make a difference in limiting

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of the THE WEST INDIAN.