"You don't have any kids? How come?"

I've been asked that question many times. I reply that it's because I feel overpopulation is the most urgent problem to be faced now and in the future. There are more people in the United States now than there were in the whole world at the time of the birth of Christ, just two thousand years ago. That's some procreating! Many of the world's problems such as crime, poverty, pollution and the destruction of the environment are linked to the unchecked growth of the human species. Education about overpopulation cannot be emphasized enough and incentives to limit family size should be implemented.

The harmful psychological effects of overcrowding due to overpopulation were made clear to me in a biology class. I read about an experiment where two rats were put into a cage and allowed to reproduce freely. At first they got along fine. That soon changed. The number of rats multiplied but they remained in the original cage. As their numbers increased, they started to exhibit anti-social behavior. The outcome of overcrowding is the same with humans. The less space people have to live in, the harder it is for them to get along. As people compete, not only for space but also for food, water and air, the more hostile their behavior becomes. Crime, and a lack of respect for other people, becomes more common as personal space is reduced. Violence is more prevalent in highly populated areas, as are other forms of criminal behavior. This is probably due to aggression and anxiety brought on by a lack of personal space.

Overpopulation also leads to poverty, disease and famine as people desperately compete for jobs, food and shelter. As the earth's population continues to grow, it will be harder to feed people. I was amazed to read about an Indonesian father who blamed the monetary crisis there for his inability to feed his nine children. I felt he should have known how he was going to feed nine children before he got his wife pregnant nine times! I find it pathetic to read about shanty towns of cardboard shacks filled with starving, disease-ridden children. Lack of adequate shelter and plumbing leads to the spread of disease, as does overcrowding. Poverty also contributes to a lack of education. According to Maslov's "Hierarchy of Human Needs," we are motivated by our lowest unmet need. These begin first with physiological needs (food and shelter), then safety and security, then social needs, then needs of our own ego and finally self-actualization. Only as each need is met
are we able to move to the next. In other words, until the basic needs are met, it is impossible for people to move to the higher levels which include education and self-improvement.

Overpopulation also contributes to the pollution of our environment. In overcrowded areas such as India and Mexico, the results are truly appalling. In Mexico City, there is a phenomenon known as "fecal snow" which occurs when the wind picks up the dried excrement lying about and rains it upon the city. Also, global warming seems to be linked to pollution of the air, and the seas are being polluted by oil spills and waste dumping. Fewer people would mean less pollution from cars, factories, planes and trains.

Man has continued to intrude upon nature's eco-systems. The South American rain forests are being decimated for farming, and the wetlands and forests of North America are being steadily encroached upon by the advance of man's cities and farms. Many species of plants and wildlife have been annihilated by man's trespassing in their habitats.

Mankind has a responsibility to the planet, our own species and to other life forms to limit reproduction. Much more emphasis needs to be placed on planning family size. More education needs to be made available about the consequences of unchecked population growth. Free birth control and family counseling ought to be made available to everyone. Every child should be planned and every child should be wanted.

Government should take an active role in alleviating the population crisis. The United States Army offers $40,000 for college if a young person enlists. Why not offer the same deal to young people who agree to be sterilized? Instead of offering a five hundred dollar a year tax break for families with children, why not require families with children to pay that much extra in taxes? The extra revenue could help pay for the children's education. As a monetary incentive to remain childless, tax rebates should be given to people who don't have children. After all, they use fewer government services.

The population bomb threatening the earth can still be defused. If the population problem were addressed, the rest of the world's woes would be much easier to remedy. Overpopulation underlies most problems facing us today. We can all help by limiting our own family size, encouraging young people to do the same and voting for laws to encourage zero population growth. A brighter future will be our reward.