

## What then must we do?

by BRIAN LOCKHART

?What then must we do??

It is a line said, then put to paper, by journalist Billy Kwan in the 1982 movie, *The Year of Living Dangerously*. It was based on a question posed in the Book of Luke in the Bible.

It was a time of turmoil in Indonesia, and Billy Kwan was trying to get word out of what was really going on.

Billy's question was never answered, because he was tossed out of a hotel window by security personnel for daring to display a banner critical of the president.

Some questions may never be answered.

The Coroner's Office in British Columbia just released a report about drug-related deaths in the province. Illicit drug deaths in B.C. were down slightly compared to the same time last year, however, the deaths of women and girls in the same period have increased dramatically.

The report says that so far this year ? mid-October ? there have been 1,749 deaths due to illicit drug overdose. There were 187 overdose deaths in August, and 183 in September. That's six people dying from a drug overdose every day.

The potent opioid fentanyl, remains the primary cause and was detected in 85 per cent of drug deaths.

That is an incredible number of preventable deaths in a province with a population of just over 5 million people.

Compare that to deaths as the result of car accidents in the province at 284 on average per year over the last five years.

If there were the same number of people dying in car crashes that were overdosing, there would be a huge uproar and response to get it under control.

In Ontario, it is reported by Ontario Public Health that in a four-and-a-half-year period leading up to 2023, there were 10,024 accidental substance toxicity deaths in Ontario.

That's an incredible number. If the nation were involved in some kind of war, and that number of people were killed, there would be a demand to cease fighting and bring them home.

Yet, every day, someone in Ontario dies from a drug overdose.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, drug and alcohol-related deaths nearly doubled in Ontario.

Illicit drugs can cripple a society. In the late 1770s, the British introduced opium to China. Before long there was a serious drug problem that invaded all levels of society in China.

The British got what they wanted, by making sure half of China was too stoned to care, and they walked in and took over.

But what must we do to stop all this carnage?

Apparently education does not work. When I was in school, we received numerous lectures about the dangers of drug abuse ? and my class was not the first to receive this shocking information.

Schools have been preaching against illegal drug use since at least the 30s.

Luckily, no one I know ever became a drug addict.

If you are told all the time that something can ruin your life, why do people still pursue that option?

While education about the danger of drug use has increased, so has the number of addicts and deaths to go along with it.

The U.S. had a 'war on drugs' a few years ago. That didn't work either.

When I was in college, my film crew had the misfortune of being hired to shoot some footage with a group of 'actresses' from Hollywood. Special note here ? if your daughter runs off to Hollywood with the intention of becoming a famous actress, and she calls you later telling you she got work as a model ? she's not modelling in the conventional sense. Far from it.

During this shoot, one of the 'actresses' said that cocaine didn't seem to be very popular here. She then asked me if I could 'score them' some cocaine.

I replied that I had no idea where the local drug dealer lived, and I also told them I don't do drugs.

This did not go over well, and the entire film crew was labelled as 'squares' because we didn't routinely wake up in a strange place with powder on our noses and no idea of what happened the previous night.

So what must we do, to stop this carnage that is taking so many lives?

Education doesn't seem to work, prison time doesn't seem to work.

The really sad thing is many of the people who have died from overdoses, are not regular users, but just some ordinary person who went to a party, and was given a substance laced with a deadly drug.

The experts in drug use, haven't been able to come up with an answer.

Maybe it's just one of those questions that will never be answered.