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Geography

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I was listening to a radio talk show the other day discussing urban housing in the big city.

A guest journalist told a story of interviewing a guy in the lovely Jane / Finch area of Toronto.

The guy's version of the world was so insulated by the four or five blocks of that neighborhood, he had no idea that the city of Toronto was built on a lake. Yes, lake Ontario. It's a body of water covering almost 19,000 square kilometers and this guy had no idea it was there.

I wasn't all that surprised really.

Years ago when I lived in Toronto we were organizing a get-together at some near downtown restaurant.

My friend's girlfriend at the time lived in the east part of the city. Because she was coming from the opposite side of the city than the rest of us we gave her directions. However, it made no sense to her at all.

She kept asking which subway stop the restaurant was at. Her entire world existed only in stops on a train line with no concept of any other location or how to get there. A trip outside of the city for her would be akin to going to Mars without a travel book.

It seems many people do not realize exactly how big the world really is.

When was the last time you looked at a map of Ontario that actually included the entire province?

The full size map of Ontario that hangs on my office wall only goes north to Sudbury. With a couple of small exceptions, and Thunder Bay, the population of the entire province is listed on that map from Windsor to Ottawa.

But Ontario continues north ? a lot farther north. Northern Ontario is very sparsely populated and is nothing but trees, thousands of lakes, and a lot of granite. It is larger that just about every country in Europe, and yet the vast majority of people in this province have neither been there or seem to be aware of exactly how big it is.

Remember those maps of the world you had in your classroom in school? Well, they're all wrong. At least wrong in laying out what the planet really looks like.

In fairness to map makers, this is because it is difficult to take a globe like the earth and draw it on a two dimensional piece of paper while keeping the lines of longitude and latitude.

Russia is a lot smaller than it appears on maps. Africa is LOT larger than it appears on maps. And remember Greenland, that massive island in the North Atlantic? It's actually only around a quarter of the size shown on a map and is roughly the same size as Algeria.

To demonstrate the sheer size of this plane, the entire U.S.A. could fit inside the Sahara Desert.

Imagine an area from Maine to Southern California, and it's all sand.

Air travel seems to have dulled peoples sense of distance.

I was once part of a broadcast interview with some women who were from California and, ahem, ?performing' in Toronto in a show.

The interviewer asked one girl how long the flight from California had been.

She replied, ?It was a five hour flight, so I guess it would have taken us eight hours if we drove.?

It was a total ?face palm' moment as the sound guy and I looked at each other in disbelief realizing a grown woman didn't know the difference between driving on land and flying at 500 mph at 35,000 feet.

When I was a kid in school, there was in our science textbooks and backed up by the teacher, a demonstration showing a ship leaving port and heading out to sea. In the photos the ship got smaller and smaller until it disappeared over the horizon. According to the book this demonstrated show the curve of the earth made the ship seem to disappear.

This of course was nonsense. If a slow moving ship crested the curve of the earth that quickly, it would be docking on the opposite coast of North America by noon the next day.

That demonstration of the curvature of the earth is easily debunked. I recently watched a very good YouTube video of this using an extremely powerful lens. It showed a full sized freighter on very flat water. The video then slowly pulled out until the ship simply disappeared and there was a normal eye level view of the ocean.

The ship was still there, on flat water, you're eyes just aren't that powerful enough to see that far.

The world may be getting smaller thanks to advanced air travel, but it's still a lot bigger than most of us realize.