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Just where did my high school self go?

by Mark Pavilons

As summer hit hard, like running face-first into a wall, I was dazed and fazed.

My two oldest children hit the ground running, spreading their wings so to speak, flying the coup.

My daughter Lexie just returned from a 5-week experiential learning program and volunteer stint in Rwanda. That's the longest she's been away, even though she's our resident world traveller.

The experiences she gained and the connections she made with Rwandan-based programs, are unforgettable.

It's her calling, and armed with her university degree, Lexie hopes to make a difference in this world of ours. While her plans are unsure at this point regarding further education, she hopes to one day join an NGO like the Red Cross, World Vision or even UN and help deliver aid around the world.

After returning home, she quickly got back into her normal ?routine? which included working and catching up with her friends here at home.

And that involved everything from a wine tour in Caledonia to a day trip in Wasaga and late-night pool parties.

My son Liam spent his post-grad week with friends up north, culminating in the famous Wasaga cabin experience. Hundreds of high school grads gather annually at Wasaga for a celebration and fortunately, everyone emerged safe and sound.

While Kim and I love the fact our kids are getting out and exploring the world, it left me with some unforeseen sadness. I?began thinking about all of my high school and college friends, and how our school day jaunts seem like a lifetime ago. Well, they were, actually.

But they're as vivid as ever.

I?can still recall our weekend trip to a friend's cottage on Christian Island. It's in Georgian Bay close to the communities of Penetanguishene and Midland. It's known as Christian Island Indian Reserve No. 30.

We took my dad's Oldsmobile and crossed on the ferry. I still remember when a teenager on the island offered to buy the car for a couple hundred dollars.

My friend Geoff also had a 26-foot sailboat that we took from Toronto to Youngstown, New York, a direct route as the crow flies. It was quite an experience.

Ken and I?won first place in a car rally, and when ?mudding??was popular we were buried waist deep in muck, along with his Suzuki 4X4.

Summers in my youth were largely spent at home, helping my parents on our rural Caledon property. As a teen, my duties included mowing the lawn on our four-acre property; helping to dig and transplant blue spruces; watering the gardens and odd jobs, which never seemed to end. Since we lived about three kilometres from Bolton, I was stuck on the homestead until I got my licence.

Our merry band of brothers hung out until our early 20s when ?life hit hard.??One moved to Belleville, another to Detroit, to pursue their careers. Two remained in the GTA, but became busy with jobs and families.

I began to think about Jim, Dave, Geoff, Brendan and Ken one recent weekend, aided by some spiked Fresca. I dashed off some emails of heartfelt sentiments and hopes are I will get together with some of them this summer. Not easy given the geography, but maybe somehow we can make it work.

It's funny how we cling to the past sometimes, and associate a portion of our lives with our high school chums. In my emails I?mentioned that life seemed a lot simpler 30 years ago but I had them all in thoughts and prayers.

Most are doing fine and their children are also doing quite well, so all is good.

I?wondered just how much of our former, 20-something selves remain buried deep inside.

High school and post-secondary experiences are very formative years for us all. I never had the elaborate grad parties and proms that my kids experienced. There were no limo rentals and tuxedoes in my day.

There were many reasons we struck up the friendships and bonds that we did in our youth. They were simple ones, though. We liked someone for their good qualities and we all got along. Those reasons should transcend the passage of time, shouldn't they?

How much have we changed in three decades??Aren't we still the ?comedian, the brain, the party animal??and the ?sensible one??

Sure, some large families arose, compounding the extent of responsibilities. Two of my friends have become more religious. We've all gained a little weight around the middle, and not all of us have a full head of hair. We all have our fair share of aches and pains.

It's funny but I think friendships like that don't come along very often. I know it sounds like a Hallmark movie, but it's true. Through good times and bad, and even worse, we were there. Night or day, we would answer the call.

Time and distance does separate us physically. Modern technology does help us keep tabs on one another, but it's not the same.

I've invited a few from my circle to gather and lift a glass this summer. It may involve a night on the couch, but I'm sure our spouses will understand.

My wife sometimes tells me not to dwell in the past. I?don't live there, but a visit now and again can't hurt.

To high school friends everywhere, live long and prosper!