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We?re constantly reinventing ourselves

by Mark Pavilons

?Qui suis-je et que signifie-je pour vous??

What am I and what do I mean to you?

This was the opening line of a poem I wrote in French class in high school.

That sentiment is as relevant today as it was back in 1980.

What do I mean to you?

In the broader sense, this question begs for details about our essence, our inner being, our MO?if you will.

On a more intimate level, it asks the much deeper question of what lies deep inside the human heart. What do I mean to you?

If you ask this of your spouse, your soul mate, you expect a certain list of answers. You mean the world to me, is one often quoted. I love you to the moon and back. But wait, my dear, this was not the question. What do I mean to you?

?Everything? springs t mind. ?You mean everything. Without you I would be lost.?

Emotions. Love.

A quote I came across recently described love not so much as a ?feeling? but a series of actions. Showing someone how we feel is vitally important. ?Feeling??love is something we have inside, but unless it's adequately expressed, it just bobs around in our innards, bouncing off those noodle-like things in our brain.

But just how do we answer the ?who am I??question for ourselves?

I'm not sure that we can.

I?am a husband, father, uncle, son-in-law and brother-in-law. I?am a journalist. I?am a homeowner, taxpayer, driver, consumer. I?like to BBQ and drink frosty, tasty beverages in the summer. I?am compassionate, considerate, generous and a problem-solver. I?like to help people. I?am also overweight, have less-than-perfect eyesight and I have selective hearing.

But these are ?what??I am not ?who.? The ingredients of a cake alone do not the final product make.

Someone else may say Mark is a great writer; has a sense of humour and likes to wear colourful, loud shirts in the summer. He's a helluva guy.

But those things could all apply to several other people, maybe even thousands of others. These are not necessarily unique qualities.

Are we who we think we are? What am I?

I am a combination of molecules, water, various chemicals, salt and a set of electrical impulses that combine to form a unique human being. But is that enough? Does that set me apart from the crowd?

We are fragile. We are emotional critters and we want to be liked.

I?remember when I?wore a younger man's clothes.

I recall taking photos at a fundraising fashion show and saw a very distinguished gentleman walk down the runway. I?had to have that outfit, so the next day I went to a nice men's shop in Bolton. The fedora, red and back silk scarf and London Fog trench coat made up the ensemble.

I wore it frequently that fall and into the winter months. Back then I also tended to wear several gold rings on each hand.

After a few months, my colleague at the time mentioned someone at the township offices said I resembled a pimp.

Not the look I was going for!

I mention this only because our outward appearance can impact the impression we leave on others. Since I was not a pimp, was I merely seeking attention, or did I?go overboard in trying to impress others? Was I compensating? Was this really me?

Maybe we spend our entire lives chiselling away at our self-image, that granite slab of ourselves. I think mine is missing a few chunks here and there.

Are we constantly reinventing ourselves?

My wife and I?celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary Aug. 5. I penned my ?renewed vows,? but I avoided the philosophical meanderings.

However, when a couple takes stock and looks at their relationship, there are many aspects that round out this partnership. Our relationships, like humans themselves, constantly change, and move like the ebbs and flows of a mountain stream. Granted, some are like Niagara Falls!

But we are not stagnant and we actually evolve over the years. Part of this evolution comes with maturity, experience and life's challenges. But a lot comes directly from our ?better halves? as well as our children. As parents we have to adapt, manage, schedule, alter, deal with and absorb.

Sure, there have been times when Kim and I?felt like Gumby, and were being stretched too far. There have been many phone calls in the middle of the night, but fortunately, we haven't had any calls from law enforcement.

Yes we are resilient, but are also frail, and our strength and faith are often tested. Often, we just can't do it alone.

And that's where our anchors come in. While they may not always like the responsibility, our ?rocks? provide order, a sense of calm and normalcy.

Kim is the level-headed problem-solver. I'm the grumpy, reluctant doer. I?agree it's not the best trade-off but most of the time it works.

Kim is the listener, the one who tries to teach as much as she loves. She often gives us a new way of looking at things. I'm more of a pragmatist, a fact-based drill sergeant without the stipes. I'm often ignored.

In the hustle and bustle of everyday life and rescuing our kids from their latest trauma, it's easy to get lost. We give up something to become more than we are.

I?don't think I?can adequately describe the love I feel for my wife. I've tried, hundreds of times in my life, to scribble down poems, short stories and columns, addressing just how important my wife is to me. Again, I think it all comes down to this: my ?what do we mean to each other??

Maybe it's a question we really don't need to answer. Perhaps we can just look into our eyes, nod in agreement and embrace the moment, embrace who we've become together.

From this ball of salt water and short circuits, love ya Kim!