

A society where \$1 million doesn't mean much

By Mark Pavilons

"If I had a million dollars ... I'd be rich," goes the 1992 song by Canadian group The Barenaked Ladies.

The song has become a cult classic, and it still brings a smile to my face when I hear it on the radio.

Among the top frivolities the band members would buy with their new-found fortune are:

A house and furniture; a K-car; tree fort; an exotic pet like a llama or an emu; lots of Kraft Dinner with expensive ketchup, and a monkey.

In 1992, the Toronto Blue Jays won their first World Series. I remember it well. The Penguins won the Stanley Cup.

The first text message ever was sent by Neil Papworth and said "Merry Christmas." It had to be typed from a PC as phones didn't allow text entry.

Roseanne, Home Improvement, Murphy Brown and Coach were some of my favourite TV shows that year. Home Alone 2 was a good movie, as was A Few Good Men.

Right Said Fred debuted "I'm Too Sexy," but Michael Jackson's "Black or White" was my favourite hit song that year.

Brian Mulroney was our prime minister and Bill Clinton became U.S. president. Roberta Bondar became the first Canadian woman in space. We signed the North American Free Trade agreement, and Princess Diana and Prince Charles separated. The first nicotine patch was introduced to help stop smoking and DNA fingerprinting emerged.

The top song that year was "I Will Always Love You," by Whitney Houston. The box office hits included Aladdin, Home Alone 2: Lost in New York, Batman Returns.

A shipping container filled with 28,000 rubber ducks was lost in the Pacific Ocean. To this day, they're still being found around the world.

In 1992, only 16 years ago, \$1 million would buy you quite a bit indeed.

A new home would cost an average of only \$140,000, while a new car would set you back \$20,000.

Let's skip down the yellow brick board and fast-forward to today, the spring of 2018 when dandelions are blooming and life is wonderful!

A million sawbucks doesn't take you as far, but I think you could still buy some of those things on the list like a monkey (unless they're banned), a car (but not a fancy one) and plenty of snack foods. Finding a house in the GTA for \$1 million may be tough. I never thought I'd ever see a billboard, exclaiming that new homes start at the "low \$1 millions." Yet those days are here.

An 800-square-foot apartment in New York City would be just over a cool million.

But you could spend 15 days in the Royal Penthouse Suite, in the President Wilson Hotel in Geneva, Switzerland.

As we humble homeowners head to the polls this year to vote in two elections, maybe we should have a quick look at what \$1 million gets you.

South of the border, the annual federal deficit has averaged more than \$1 million per minute.

If you earn \$50,000 a year, it would take you 20 years to rake in a million dollars.

It's all about perspective, I say.

Today, we have to run faster and harder to chase the all-mighty dollar. We've dug ourselves a pretty large hole.

As my daughter and I drove to the subway station in Vaughan recently, we talked about her volunteer trips abroad. She loved being far removed from civilization in Kenya and enjoying the friendly village atmosphere in Switzerland. She loved the hard-working, yet appreciative souls she met in Guatemala.

As Porsches and Maseratis whizzed past us, we pointed out that the money these machines cost would go a very long way in developing nations.

How has it come to the point where our homes are surpassing \$1 million and \$200,000 luxury cars are commonplace? How is it we live in modern subdivisions with manicured lawns, and yet we still don't know our neighbours? When did we let money, debt and stress rule our lives?

All very good questions.

Lexie pointed out that in places like remote villages in Switzerland and even more remote areas of Kenya, you feel in touch with Mother Nature. You know your place and have a great love of the wide, open spaces.

This, she said, puts us humans in our place. The world, in all of its glory and beauty, doesn't need us puny human beings at all. In fact, the Earth would be much better off if we never evolved past the stone age.

We climb the ladder, and get two jobs, just so we can keep ahead of the skyrocketing hydro bills, and continue to put gas in our vehicles. We work harder just so we can enjoy a dinner out with the family.

We may be at our technological and financial height as a society, but at what cost? Are we truly living the dream when \$1 million isn't considered a lot of money?

Lexie pointed out the mud huts occupied by the Maasai people in Kenya were efficient, well made and quite toasty. Some of these people farm and attain a certain level of status in their tribe, but seldom venture outside their realm. Others venture to the urban centres, get an education, but return to their roots to better the lives of their fellow men and women.

The Narok and The Great Rift Valley arguably the cradle of mankind present vast, seemingly endless vistas.

When was the last time any of us sat back and just enjoyed the view?

If someone told me, back in 1992 while I was watching Roseanne, that I'd have a million-dollar home, I would have chuckled. Had someone warned me about climate change, emoticons and self-driving cars, I would have been concerned.

I'm still concerned. I'm worried that when my children have families of their own, \$2 million will seem trivial. I'm uneasy that the cost of living and huge debt will crush many average souls. What will things be like in 16 years from now, in 2034?

Is it too late to move to the jungles of Borneo and build a treehouse?