

# Absentmindedness is my new normal

by Mark Pavilons

?As you get older three things happen. The first is your memory goes, and I can't remember the other two.?

??orman Wisdom

I'm with ya, Norm.

My car is supposed to prevent the absent-minded driver from locking his keys inside.

Alas, it's been some time since I read the manual and I'm not sure where I put it.

There I was on a sunny November day watching the comings and goings at a local grocery store.

I was leaning on my car because I locked myself out.

No one was at home to fetch my spare set and I didn't really want to call CAA. So, I waited patiently with only my thoughts and relative stupidity for company.

It has been more than 20 years since I locked the keys in my mom's Buick on a sunny summer's day. Fortunately, on that occasion, I?left the window down a crack, so, with the aid of a stick or something (can't remember which), I hit the flat button on the door grip and voila, salvation.

This time, however, no such luck. I had to wait for my wife to finish work, run home for the spare key and come to my rescue. She does that a lot in our house!

The event did give me time to pause and reflect, even though I've been doing that a lot lately.

While my wife often says it must be nice living in my head, it couldn't be further from the truth. It's dark and nasty in there sometimes.

My lack of memory skills has invaded our kitchen and impacted my limited culinary talents.

I?often try to make meals for the family, and I?consider myself quite good at making chili, chicken cacciatore, meat sauces, even metabola. But for the life of me, every time I make my youngest daughter's favourite ??hepherd's pie ?? always forget the key ingredients. She loves corn, carrots and peas in her dish.

There have been times lately, more often than not, where I?misplace my phone and have to get someone in the house to call me. My wife is also quite good at this, but her phone is often on vibrate, so locating her device becomes more of a scavenger hunt.

I don't mind running errands and have a very tactical, practical approach ??tting the various places on a specific route to save time. And yet, even with list firmly in hand, I forget something. I arrive home all smiles, only to be told the main reason I went out was somehow forgotten. Picture the forehead slap, over and over.

I've never really had a great memory and can only recall a few childhood moments or events.

Even special occasions over the last decade are sparse in this hardened noggin.

But my wife, OMG she has a memory like a steel trap. Like many moms, she recalls, with vivid detail, each and every child's birth, first steps, first words ... I remember a few times rocking them to sleep and struggling with the folding stroller, but that's about it.

My wife also has a knack for remembering song lyrics, dates, and much more.

Oscar Wilde once said that memory is the diary that we all carry about with us.

That's great, if only I could remember the best chapters!

I think it may not be solely my gray matter that's to blame. It could be the MSG or even the spice in those hot Takis. I think a lot has to do with what's on our ever-growing plates these days.

Our to-do lists are so long, we have to type them into our phones and carry them with us everywhere we go. I get countless texts from my family when they know I'm out, but often, I get their wish list two minutes after I've left the store. Sometimes I'm forced to backtrack, and others, well, c'est la vie.

In a way it's sad.

I can recall facts, figures, data and interesting theories on time and space, but I often forget where the screwdriver is. I've misplaced the disposable bags to our robo vacuum, rendering it momentarily useless.

I remember to take my pills each morning, and yet sometimes, I look at the bottles trying to figure out if I've already swallowed that one.

My memories of my dearly departed family members are vague, but I've been dreaming about them more lately, for some strange reason. But in my dreams, they're always in a bad mood!

Scientists say that memories are now scattered throughout our brain and that the brain actually reshapes itself with each new memory. Wow, that's crazy.

The hippocampus is the key and this internal gizmo transfers memories from short-term to long-term storage.

But here's the catch. In order to etch things in our memory, the brain has to experience it over and over, not just once. This strengthens the neural circuits.

Like a muscle, when you stop using it, it weakens and fades.

Emotion, apparently, plays a role in memory the stronger the feelings, the more memorable the event. So, if your life is filled with so-so moments, you won't remember them.

But the brain and all of its memory-bearing parts the basal ganglia, cerebellum and prefrontal cortex are still mysteries.

And just where does the brain park one's soul?

I'd like to think I'm not absentminded, but rather have different priorities. My brain recalls the important stuff when the mortgage is due, taxes and car maintenance where it can find it. The trivia junk, well, that's plopped into the abyss.

Maybe we need to exercise our heads a bit more. We can take supplements that contain Phosphatidylserine, Bacopa Monnieri and Huperzine A. We can eat more blueberries and broccoli.

Or we can aim to have better life experiences and let our emotions run free.

I choose the latter.