

?Brotherhood? is a mighty powerful thing

by Mark Pavilons

?Friends are the siblings God never gave us.? ? Mencius

I never had a brother and often wonder what that would have been like.

My older sister and I were almost eight years apart so, for most of my childhood, we weren't close. And, in those days, having your little brother tag along just wasn't cool.

When she became ill and moved back into my parents' home, we got a bit closer. She received a kidney transplant and went blind ??efinitely a lot for a person to go through.

My wife Kim went above and beyond to include Angela in as many activities as possible. Verbally explaining a movie in a crowded theatre did present its challenges, but we weren't fazed. It also provided some comical moments.

There were many trips to dialysis, between Bolton and St. Mike's, and then Alliston. My dad chose not to lend a hand so the responsibility fell on me and my mom's shoulders. It was tough sometimes, but it was family.

You do what's required.

She died prematurely before her 50th birthday, leaving a daughter behind.

Unfortunately, my sister wasn't my ?bestie? as some siblings enjoy.

For me, the term ?brotherhood? is an elusive and incomprehensible concept. As young men in the 1980s, our friends were buds, pals, and mates.

We'd make sure everyone got home safe, and they always had an open invitation to our home.

We enjoyed summer trips, backyard gatherings and hanging out.

But it was a different kind of relationship ? as Boomers we still weren't comfortable sharing emotions, hugging or saying the ?L? word.

We called one another regularly, and on weekends we went down the list to see who was free and willing to venture out.

We got to know our friends' parents and were always polite.

But even with my own sister, I?never had that strong, unbreakable bond of a brother. Maybe I didn't try hard enough.

As I ponder my life in recent years and play tug-of-war with the demons in my head, I feel somewhat isolated, alone, walking but leaving only one set of footprints behind. Would a brother or sister help me along my current journey and path? Would they offer a shoulder to cry on?

I have no idea.

And despite my self-imposed solitude, I am reminded that we are all brothers and sisters, siblings if you will. Sure, we may be

distant cousins, fair-weather friends, or acquaintances who gather infrequently for coffee or lunch.

But isn't knowing they're there, rooting for us during all of our trials and tribulations, somewhat comforting?

At times, yes.

Many of us share a brotherhood in many areas ? sports teams, organizations, service clubs, first responders, and of course our military men and women.

One of my friends from high school came from a long line of military veterans. When he entered the service out of high school, we didn't always understand his passion, but I?get it now.

I?appreciate and even respect his choice and continuing his family's military heritage. It's quite unique these days.

He definitely understands the term ?brother.?

Martin Luther King, Jr., once noted ?the beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace is more precious than diamonds or silver or gold.?

Not being familiar with the salutation of ?brotherhood,? imagine my surprise and love when such a term was bestowed upon me recently.

King's former fire chief Jim Wall constantly refers to me as ?brother? in our email exchanges. I'm sure it comes from the brotherhood enjoyed by firefighters, a unique breed to be sure. I'm honoured, of course, but I could never rise to the level of fire-fighting brethren who have crazy amounts of courage, strength and commitment. I feel almost ashamed to have this moniker. Yet I feel it deeply and for that, Jim, I am truly grateful.

I only hope I can live up to such a title.

One of my faithful readers and well-known King residents, Joe S., also recently referred to me as ?brother? in a text message. He loves my columns and I think we share a lot of common ground.

Perhaps, in this case it's more like brother in a Christian sense, a spiritual kinship if you will. You can never too many spiritual brothers and sisters.

?It takes two men to make one brother.?

I appreciate the salutation, Joe.

I envy those with such strong sibling bonds.

I often remind my children that when they get older, they will come to rely on one another ? as rocks, as friends, companions, guidance counsellors, and sounding boards. One day, they will reminisce about their childhoods, share laughs and raise a glass now and again. They will raise families and ideally stay close, if not in distance, then in heart.

Perhaps, if I have done my job well, they will speak my name with pride. And I will smile from my heavenly perch as I look down.

I will not be there to guide them or offer fatherly advice. They may already have what they need, if they've been listening to me over the years.

Tears flow down my careworn face when I think that I won't be there to walk them down the aisle or share the joys of their own

children. I will be a ghost, a shadow of what once was. But I will argue and plead with the ultimate powers to allow me to stretch out my hand and place it lovingly on their shoulders.

Such is the circle of life. And such is the destiny of all of us, brothers and sisters alike.