

Checking things off my bucket list

By Mark Pavilons

I never really thought of 'bucket list' ideas until recently.

I loved the 2007 movie of the same name starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman.

Some say that's where the term got its popularity and it's tough to actually track down the origins of this saying.

Simply put, it's a list of the things that a person would like to do or achieve before they die.

American author Sark advises us to 'fill your life with tiny and large adventurous moments.'

And Eleanor Roosevelt said: 'The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.'

People have come up with thousands of normal, adventurous and outlandish things to do before the bucket is empty. But really, any new experience is bucket-list worthy. It may not be earth-shattering, but if it's important to you, that's all that matters.

I'm lucky in many ways, and could scratch off maybe two dozen items on a typical person's list: Flying in a plane and helicopter, visiting the Caribbean, Europe and various Canadian and American cities. I flew over the Hoover Dam; attempted skiing and skating. I'm not really a winter sport person and much prefer the warmer climes.

I swam in lakes, rivers and oceans. I have driven many cars, eaten in fancy restaurants and even owned a pair of leather pants!

I once got an eagle in golf and scored a few goals in the limited sports I played.

Some of these aren't really bucket list worthy, however.

It's funny because statistics say that most of us in North America don't venture too far from home. It's estimated the average Canadian lives (and dies) within 300 kilometres of where they were born.

But we do love to travel and Canadians are welcome around the world. I've been to the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, The Bahamas, and St. Maarten. Each has its unique flavour and draw.

I remember my mom telling me in my mid-20s that travel is a must. I had to make every effort to get away and see for myself the lure of the tropics.

She was right, of course. Moms usually are.

Kim and I really soaked up the fun in the sun and our tans spoke for themselves. We saw sunrises and sunsets, and were knocked silly by several waves.

We tried, as often as we could, to engage the locals and find out about their lives and culture.

We hated the term 'tourist' for its negative innuendo, and much preferred 'visitor' or 'guest.'

Each adventure was different and some even presented some inherent dangers. Oh, the reckless naivete.

We brought back some nice jewellery from St. Maarten, where my wife treated me to a wedding gift. Jewellery shops there (at least at the time) invited you in, gave you a beer and let you sit and chat. If they didn't have what you were looking for, they'd literally run down the street to another shop to grab that special item. Very reasonable, especially considering today's sky-high gold prices. I wouldn't even consider buying gold today.

I've been to casinos in Atlantic City and Vegas, enjoying sights and sounds of these sinful places that never sleep.

I've been to the horse races at Woodbine and enjoyed a lucrative Father's Day triactor win with my dad. One of the best days ever for both him and I.

I have been to the theatre and was mesmerized by The Phantom of the Opera during its Toronto run. I've tried to take the kids to as many of these as I could over the years, to expand their horizons and give them an appreciation of the arts. Both of my girls loved each and every one.

I actually owned a 1970 Camaro RS. Picked it up in my teens for under \$1,000. Loved that car. Today, a totally refurbished one sells for upwards of \$50,000. Oh, the short-sightedness of youth.

Variety definitely is the spice of life.

I feel bad for those who live somewhat sheltered, off-the-map lives in some backwoods region of any country. They never get to explore the world and truly appreciate what we've been given.

Heck, I've read that some places in the southern U.S. still don't have plumbing or electricity. This is also true of several developing nations around the globe, where poverty reigns and human lives come and go with nary a glance.

So sad.

Another way to truly appreciate our brethren is to volunteer abroad, or take on a challenge of giving back. I highly recommend it.

I've been blessed, thanks to my oldest daughter Lexie, who encouraged me to join her on one of her humanitarian missions to the DR, helping to improve the plight of migrant Haitian sugar cane workers. Eye-opening to say the least. Humbling, too.

Despite the poverty, I was uplifted by the human spirit, the resilience and faith these people showed. Their hope for advancement was severely limited and most were happy to just enjoy each day as it came, making it to the next.

I'm reminded by Mother Teresa's words: "If you can't feed a hundred people, feed just one."

Imagine if we in North America, added that to our bucket list?

Maybe our bucket list isn't a list, or a bucket at all. Perhaps it's a culmination of the experiences that make up who we are. It's about the basic human emotions.

And those are things I really hope we take with us into the next world.