

Don't forget the past; it's vitally important to the present

by MARK PAVILONS

Our family members, and our DNA, are our only link to the past.

Many believe what's past is past, and just leave it alone.

But how can we? The past represents so much, not just for each of our family histories, but for all of humankind. It's so damn interesting.

A lot of people, perhaps more so the Boomers, feel proud of where they came from and the hard work it took to get here. That's part of who we are, and we sure can't forget that.

It seems the older we get, the more we reminisce about the past. I'm not sure why this happens, but I think we're all guilty of it. Maybe the stress brought on by the pandemic has turned our thoughts to simpler times, when our lives were less complicated.

Growing up in rural Caledon in the 1970s and '80s was pretty quiet. Duffy's Lane (formerly the 6th Line Albion) was a dirt road with little traffic. We lived on a four-acre parcel so it was really our small slice of paradise. We had gardens, expansive lawns, tree stands and the Humber River flowed through our back yard.

I had chores and there was always plenty of grass to cut. But at times, it was like a scene from one of those movies about the American mid-west -- all, waving grass, and laying on your back looking at the clouds.

As a kid, there was nothing like sticking your feet in the river and watching the minnows stop by to say hello and greet you with some quick nibbles on your toes. There were frogs and skunks and groundhogs.

Sitting on my dad's home-made bench in front of our house is where Kim and I bonded, talked and dreamed. It's where we fell in love.

Mattie Stepanek urged us to "keep all special thoughts and memories for lifetimes to come" and to share these keepsakes with others to "inspire hope and build from the past."

Paul Scott once wrote that the past is a "texture, an ambiance to our present."

If you think about it, aren't we all a culmination of our past? Wouldn't there be a huge, gaping hole in our guts without our own personal history?

Humans are definitely fickle. So many tell us to ignore the past and set our sights on the future.

But we keep breathing new life in things from the past. We have once again embraced "retro" designs. We devour old books and old movies. We wonder what it would be like to live in the Wild West, and we lose ourselves in stories of medieval knights, kings and fair maidens.

Who doesn't love vinyl and record players? What about jukeboxes and the Walkman? Who hasn't spent a week's allowance in an arcade?

I would love an evening of sitting around the table, with kids "washing up" without being told; with plenty of "please" and "thank you's" being uttered, and a heartfelt grace. There's a lot to be said for such a "Little House on the Prairie" scenario.

And the food! Who doesn't remember a great family meal, or one of mom's favourite recipes?

We frequently eat the stuffing passed along by Kim's mom. The Christmas day breakfasts at my in-laws are legendary. We still have my mom's gravy boat, a cherished little dish that emerges during special occasions.

My mom enjoyed the holidays and my dad always went to the back 40 to pick the perfect spruce for our Christmas trees. I can still see it in my mind, in its place of honour in the corner of our living room. And yes, there were plenty of times when dad I shovelled snow that was up to our waist!

My mom would always tell us of her childhood Christmases. They were never allowed to see the tree until Christmas Eve, and were awestruck by its beauty when the parlour doors opened.

Candles adorned the branches and each child had to recite a poem or sing a carol to mark the occasion. They received only one gift, typically something practical. They went to church.

They genuinely loved their neighbours and their community. There was an air of optimism, even during some very tumultuous times in Europe in the 1930s and 40s.

These were my mom's memories, and so, they are part of me. I can't, and won't let them go. I embrace them.

Leave the past behind? Are you nuts?

As we celebrate this time of year, I'm sure a large part of our gatherings involve traditions that go back a very long time. We just couldn't celebrate without them!

You would think the younger generation would find such tales boring and 'old school.' But the times we have shared our memories with our children, their eyes grew to the size of saucers and they hung on every sentence. They really are like sponges.

I think it's vitally important to share our family stories with our kids, grandkids and great-grandkids.

The past is where it all began. It's the very definition of perspective.

They say you are given a brief mental tour of your life when the end is near. Do you think it will be filled with images of Facebook, that new car smell, or purchases on Amazon? No, it will likely contain visions of childhood birthdays, family dinners, honeymoons, our kids' school plays and good night kisses. We will relive first dates, drive-ins and school dances.

Forget the past, indeed. I'll have none of that.

Nor should any of us. I say keep the past burning bright, smile about it, and let it fuel your present.

May your holidays be filled with untold memories and traditions that are merry and bright!