

Finding, and defining joy in our lives

by MARK PAVILONS

After examining one's purpose in my last column, here is a new introspective question to ponder.

My daughter asked: "Do you want to feel more joy and what are some things you can do to feel this way?"

Joy. Hmm.

It's defined as "the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires ... a state of happiness or felicity."

Kind of vague, don't you think?

Buddha said that when our minds are pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.

But the walls we build around us keep out both sadness and joy.

Of course, we all long to find and experience joy. We want to squeeze every morsel out of it and never let it go.

The vision of joy differs from person to person. Some find it in fulfilling work and achievements; other see it in the budding flowers they planted in their garden. Some see joy spring to life in creative expression and knowledge, and still others equate joy with friendship, family and happiness.

Tim Cook encouraged us to let joy be in the journey, not the distant goal.

And Mother Teresa said: "Joy is prayer; joy is strength; joy is love; joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls."

As you can see, joy is pretty tough to put your finger on. And for many, it's elusive, hiding just out of reach.

I can't really describe it, either. For me, joyful moments are those special, frozen-in-time parts of the day. Watching the pooches frap or do something silly never fails to make me laugh out loud. Sharing a joke with my kids - especially when we're all on the same page - is always fun. Even making my wife cry with sentimental words written in a greeting card brings me elation.

But I think, by and large, joy just happens. You can't force it, just like you can't force health, wealth and happiness. They all take concerted effort, a lifetime of commitment.

Yes, I firmly believe you can find joy in the moment, and in many little things along the way. There's joy in spring, and watching new life emerge from the soil. The colours that unfold are simply marvellous.

For me, I love sitting in our backyard in the summer, looking at the forest, watching for signs of life.

I find it amazing that I get to share my space with hummingbirds, bees, dragonflies and birds.

They don't know what joy is, but they do have a habit of creating it.

As a child, I found joy in the holidays, and gathering around the dinner table. I found pleasure in reading, writing poetry, drawing and building models. I still tinker with tiny model airplanes because they soothe my complex mind with really simple ideas and

thoughts.

?Building a plastic model is a form of art. And like any art, it's subjective. What matters is not what others think of your model, but what you think of it. And how much you enjoyed making it.?

Joy can be simple or very complex.

Many people spend a lot of time in their lives trying to outsmart their own vulnerabilities or shortcomings. They equate joy with success or some sort of recognition.

If you wait for pats on the back, you'll be disappointed.

Many ?experts??say we should focus on creating joy and not merely accepting it as it comes.

That's all well and good, but the practicality of life says otherwise.

We have to spend roughly eight hours per day working for a living. Money is necessary to put a roof over our heads, food on the table and brand name brand runners on our kids' feet. It pays for our taxes, car repairs and dog food.

With a third of our lives dedicated to the ?grindstone,? another third is spent sleeping.

Recharging our minds and bodies every night is vital to our overall wellbeing. It's not a luxury, but a necessity.

And that leaves roughly eight to 10 hours per day to do as we please. And that ?pleasure? often entails cooking, doing dishes, running errands, helping kids with their homework and getting stressed out by watching the nightly news.

One could argue there's little joy in any of these things.

Of course, you can always exploit any situation for nuggets of brightness.

After my chemo sessions at Southlake in Newmarket, my wife and I would venture to Costco and it became a bit of a tradition. It turned a rather unpleasant task into time together, exploring the massive shelves of massive products. We found bargains and had a few laughs.

While I can't speak for anyone else, I?know that mental health issues tend to kick joy to the ground and place a not-so-tender shoe on its chest. I?have experienced waves of dread, sweeping over me out of nowhere, knocking me off-balance.

My health concerns dominate my thoughts ??very second of every day. There's no joy in cancer.

I have let it crush almost all joy within me, succumbing to the darkness on a regular basis.

I?wish?I could wag my tail like a happy puppy, who seems content just to be alive and finds joy in seeing someone's face at the end of the day.

I?think, perhaps, joy is also shutting out the anguish and letting in the glee, comfort and wonder.

And finding humour, wherever it may be lurking, is always satisfying.

Hugh Sidey once said that a sense of humour is needed armour in life. ?Laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life.?

While I may have a pretty good grasp of life, it doesn't mean I'm filled with joy.

But I welcome all spontaneous feelings of joy.

The joy of life, according to Aleister Crowley, is in the exercise of one's energies; continual growth; constant change; the enjoyment of every new experience.

Have at it, I say.