

Having the chance to meet yourself

by BROCK WEIR

Do you ever stop for a moment and think back on your formative years and wonder whether the 'you of today' would have been friends with the person you were decades ago, or even as a child?

Maybe you have, maybe you haven't, maybe you have no intention to. That's fine. Perhaps you're focused on always looking forward rather than backward, but recently I have found this to be a worthwhile exercise.

I've had plenty of opportunities to get to know my childhood self once again as we prepare to move after 20-odd years in the same abode.

The last time we were on the move, when I was just starting university, the moving process was greatly aided by a neighbour who, although helpful, didn't have the best sorting system. As I've been working on excavating the contents of the basement, I've found dusty plastic totes that appear to have been packed with wild abandon - that is without any rhyme or reason for their contents.

Sorting? I guess there was no time for that.

Amid pieces of school room art going back to Grade 1, perhaps even earlier, were high school papers written well over a decade later, photos from no single year strewn about, once-fresh chestnuts that withered accordingly over the decades to little more than dust, ancient chocolates and candies left over from Halloween and Valentine's Days of yore, and handfuls of Flintstones trading cards that somehow made their way into EVERY. SINGLE. BOX.

I don't know how they managed it, but in some perverse way it is awe-inspiring.

I have to admit, however, going through some 15 totes of substantial volume was never an enticing prospect; but after going through seven grab-boxes of trash, opening up that eighth one and seeing a still-wrapped but melted piece of Quality Street solidified onto a wallet-sized image of Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm was more than a little disheartening.

Last fall, as this process hit its midway point, I wrote a bit about this. At the time, I had come across a cache of documents from my early school years where, at least on paper, I was experiencing some difficulty in the classroom.

For whatever reason, apparently I was lashing out at people, whether my classmates or my teachers, primarily verbally. There was a full run-down of my behaviour, suggestions to my parents on what to do about it, some pages quite prescriptive, and even some 'contracts' drawn up by my teachers, and signed by them, my parents and myself, agreeing to specific methods of dealing with frustration, anger, and more.

At the time, it was a slightly disconcerting discovery as I had no recollection of this apparently troubled time. I was reading about myself, yet it described a person I had no recollection of let alone a connection.

But things have turned in a more positive direction.

Over the last couple of weeks, as the clock has ticked down to moving day, we've done another deep dive into the basement. With the intention to cull even more ruthlessly than the first attempt over the fall, I found a couple of boxes that only made me smile.

One box contained scores of magazines from the first half of the 1990s I felt appropriate to save for future reference. These ranged from informative tabloid-adjacent 'Where are they now??' volumes that updated us on what stars from the so-called 'Golden Age of Hollywood' have been up to recently - to rags firmly in the tabloid camp, one of which was entirely, and inexplicably, devoted to

celebrities, mostly of a certain age, caught at their very worst.

These were, mind you, celebrities my peers of that age had likely never heard of, but they were very well-known to me and, admittedly, still of great interest ? although, today, there is little interest in seeing them at their absolute worst, but back then I had to take what I could get!

The other box contained a wild collection of elementary school presentations ? on Bristol board, of course ? through the years that were almost invariably on topics related to I Love Lucy. A presentation on newsmakers? Why, Lucille Ball (presented in a red heart) and Desi Arnaz (presented in a black conga drum) of course! A poster for French class on the book we're currently reading? While I'd wager that a lot of my peers wrote about the latest from R.L. Stein, for me it was the latest book on Vivian Vance.

These are enduring passions for me, but the funny thing is when I previously looked back on the interests that made me tick in these years, I remember being self-conscious of them, trying to keep them hidden and on the backburner as any time they came up, they would elicit no small degree of mockery at best and bullying at worst from my fellow youths.

I was so relieved this wasn't quite the case and whatever light this represented wasn't hidden under the proverbial bushes ? my truth was lived, as one might say, damn the consequences.

One key conclusion was that if I met my young self today, I'd think I'd find him a good egg and we'd probably be friends ? and that realization helped many other elements of my childhood fall into place.

A few years ago, thanks to Marie Condo, there was a movement to get rid of everything that didn't spark joy, the theory being that it weighs you down ? and not just as far as boxes are concerned. But who knows what will spark joy at any one period of time?

A few years ago, would an old Bristol board from a long-forgotten French class from 1994 spark joy? Probably not, but as I'm more reflective in this time of transition, it certainly did recently.

In fact, it has only reinforced my view that we ? all of us ? need to be kinder to ourselves ? even if it is a version of ourselves in memory or with the material goods we've brought with us over the years.

Even if your childhood was no picnic, I can only hope your adult self can look back fondly on these building blocks that formed the foundation of who you are now, whether or not the surface memories are less than rosy.

If that is the case, I hope you learn from the experience and now have the tools today to have been a friend to that youngster who might have needed someone beyond their family in their corner during these formative years.

And, with this in mind, if you have a child in your life, whether they are your own, nieces or nephews, a godchild, or simply even a kid who belongs to someone in your friend circle, I hope you encourage their quirks, their interests, even if they seem just a little bit weird, and foster their wholly unique outlooks on life.