

It's my party and I'll sigh if I want to?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Someone I know and love will be hitting a milestone birthday soon and, while mine isn't a milestone, as I write this column, I too am celebrating another year around the sun. It puts me in a reflective mood, beginning with the conscious decision many like me also make - that when you've had any kind of a health challenge - every birthday is a milestone and a reason to celebrate. That said, the older I get (and the more world-weary) it's my party and while I am celebrating, I'll also sigh if I want to.

Birthdays can have a sobering effect. Especially birthdays after a certain age, when you realize that realistically, you have more years behind you than in front of you. I don't mean that in a depressing way, but using my current age as a starting point, to think I have another 50 years to do whatever I want would put me well above 100 (closer even 120!) and since Canada's life expectancy tops out at 83.9 years for women, that seems unrealistic. Essentially what birthdays over the age of 50 should mean is that if you do have a 'to do' list - you better start working on getting it done! This alone is a reason to sigh?but let's try to focus on the positive instead.

If there's any money left in the kitty, it's time to treat yourself and stop waiting for the proverbial 'rainy day.' Treat today as the rainy day and every day is 'today.' Not everything is about the big glamorous adventures, either. I simply think that after putting in time working hard; maybe raising some kids, paying down a mortgage, or both, the post-50+ years should be a time to shift the focus back on to oneself. That said, this is another one of the things that makes me sigh. Why? Because maybe, just maybe, we've got it all wrong and we never should have waited in the first place. Life doesn't come with any kind of warranty and there's only one way out and not a single one of us ever knows when our 'best before' date might be. So treating yourself, yes even while on a budget, or squished in between hockey practice or parent/teacher night, should still be on your list of things to do regardless of age.

I've always thought that evolutionary speaking we're kind of a dumb species. Many of us, myself included, are no better than the squirrels running around gathering nuts in feverish anticipation of winter. Supposedly us humans have evolved beyond basic autonomous functioning and are capable of higher-order thinking and yet, as my Mum would say, 'you can't put an old head on young shoulders.' It doesn't matter how many times we encourage a new parent to enjoy the little moments, or to sleep when the baby sleeps, because they are too busy in the moment to appreciate the advice. They scoff, (indeed I scoffed) thinking 'give me a break, I have kids, laundry, a job, a mortgage'I don't have time for a treat, or to appreciate the little things.'

Under the category of yet another thing that makes me sigh is this: why is it only as we get older we begin to understand those little things were the things that really mattered. If only our evolutionary process had a built-in 'it's ok to be selfish' once in a while and to not feel guilty about taking a time-out to actually enjoy the process of living, rather than just squirreling away the nuts in anticipation of a future that's not guaranteed.

Whatever your age, my hope for you is that THIS is the year you commit to yourself. It doesn't mean to the exclusion of all else, but rather, that you recognize the importance of you and all that you offer to this world. YOU are special and there are people who love you no matter what and even in your darkest moments. What might those people say to you, or about you, right now? What would you say to your best friend, or your child or your parents? If it's something nice, or to do something nice for yourself, it's ok to say all of those things to yourself too. Don't wait for the rainy day. Aging and perspective both, are a privilege denied to many. Don't squander them.

Oh yes 'and while I am encouraging you to say what's on your mind, here's one last thing that really does make me sigh. A tunnel. Seriously. A tunnel under the 401, Premier Ford? For real? That's your answer to traffic chaos when there's a perfectly good highway, barely used, just down the road? In the used car sales business, the 407 would be called 'pristine,' labeled as 'low mileage,' and a 'steal.' Open the damn 407 for goodness sake and for the record, no we can't bore a tunnel under the 401 'it's an idea so ludicrously absurd one wonders if this announcement was made simply to serve as a distraction from something else?'

Dear readers, you didn't really think I'd write a whole column about sunshine and rainbows, aging and perspective, and not be even a tad curmudgeonly on my birthday did you? It's my party and I'll sigh if I want to - in this case over yet more traffic nonsense.