

Just how much can a person bear?

by Mark Pavilons

Reggie White once said that "God places the heaviest burden on those who can carry its weight."

When we are burdened, we say we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. Our burdens, both mental and physical, help shape our experiences and make us who we are.

Making difficult choices "and we're confronted with these on a regular basis" is part of being human. Our choices and their repercussions define us and shape our destinies.

The average man can lift between 135 and 175 pounds, so I assume that's what rests on my shoulders. I admit it's been a while since I did a bench press.

I remember my dad commenting that I had broad shoulders, a quality he saw as strong and masculine. Little did he know that with broad shoulders comes an increased load to carry. His generation's thinking, which filtered into my own, included silent males, men who didn't cry or discuss their problems and challenges.

Too bad. I think regular bouts of self-disclosure and release would have done us both the world of good.

The first man so burdened was Atlas, who was punished by Zeus. He was tasked with literally holding up the heavens on his shoulders for all eternity.

We are also "weighed down," another expression pointing to our heavy responsibilities. And if we have a "cross to bear," we confront challenges on our own.

Matthew 11:28-30 reminds us that God will switch yokes with us and ease our burdens.

Typically used for pack animals, a yoke was a long wooden beam placed on them to pull a plow or cart.

So, quite literally, we are all sporting this wooden beam, which contains all of our troubles and worries.

There have been times when I felt like a donkey or mule, trudging through the mud, carrying out some undesirable task or chore. I just wanted the burden to end.

It's been said that a person's true strength is knowing what weight needs to be carried, and what weight can be let go.

Good advice, to be sure.

And yet we frail humans do love our yoke and chains. We are all history buffs "we love the pain of the past!"

Parents are the pack animals of society, always willing to take on more weight to keep families together. Not only do we struggle with our own difficulties, we take on those of our children. At times, it's like we're bombarded with challenges, dramas and traumas.

We're expected to know what to do, in every situation, at all times.

I will tell you from experience, it ain't so. Each of us has our own area of expertise and knowledge. We are not wise in all areas of life. We learn by doing.

Sometimes, experience is the only real teacher and our youngins have to make the journey on their own. They have to touch the hot stove from time to time to understand heat.

We can offer advice, direction and tidbits we've gathered along the way of in our own personal expeditions. Admittedly, they don't fit every situation.

And our young minds today don't seem satisfied with our 'old school' or 'tried and true' approaches. They question everything. While that's a very good quality, the reality is we've helped create a society, a system, that is cemented in place. Our Canada today has been shaped by all who came before us, and the sacrifices they made.

Sure, our modern, top-heavy governments are challenging and expensive and don't always put people first.

I tell my offspring that they are in the driver's seat and they can usher in change in the decades to come. Our work is all but done.

I recall, as an eager college student, wanting to change the world with ideas and the written word. I wanted to educate, inform and inspire.

I even ran for political office, believing I could make a difference in local governance.

But, unlike our brothers and sisters of the 1960s, we late Boomers were more interested in education, security and raising families. We had peace signs on our t-shirts, but never fully understood their meaning.

We didn't revolt, but rather tried to slowly shape things to our liking.

Until we became parents and the proud owners of mortgages, our loads were less heavy, less stressful.

I've found that in recent years perhaps the last 6 or 7 that life has decided to change dealers, and the cards went cold.

And now, I feel the weight almost daily, mentally and physically.

It may have something to do with my cancer journey, or it may just be 'maturity' (a nice way to say older). I have finally learned to let certain things slide off my shoulders and that's a very good thing, let me tell you.

We all fight the good fight on our own, not always relying on our support network of friends and loved ones. They can also supply the muscle to ease some of that weight we're lifting.

We don't have to be the guardians of the world around us. The weight can be shared by all.

I'm not sure if the current, younger generation is willing to shoulder some of this responsibility.

Hopefully, they are engaged enough to become the Atlases of their generation.

'All you could do was take on as much weight as you can bear. And if you're lucky, there's someone close enough by to shoulder the rest,' wrote Sarah Dessen (Just Listen). As careworn as my frame is, I am always willing to help others. The Beatles knew all about getting by with a little help from their friends.

On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you stumble, may the clay dance to balance you!