

## Kicking 2024 to the curb

by Mark Pavilons

It's been said that time flies.

Well, for yours truly, 2024 couldn't have flown by fast enough.

In my 61-plus years on the planet, I've enjoyed roughly 22,385 days. That's a lot of sunrises and sunsets, let me tell you.

Most of our days are gobbled up by routine, mundane tasks, chores and work-related duties.

We spend the good part of our 16-hour waking days tending to things. Just think about it we spent roughly 1/3 of our lives sleeping; another few years stuck in traffic and a year or three waiting in line. To have just one of those years back.

Sure, there are a few hours each evening to enjoy a meal, exchange small talk with the family and watching the latest reality TV show. And, if you're a blessed dog-owner, there's always time to wrestle and cuddle with the pooches.

A few times of the year we get to just chill and relax, soaking up the atmosphere of just doing nothing. If we're lucky, we get to leave our comfy homes and spend a week or so to enjoy the great outdoors, or sandy beaches.

But our summers are too short. Despite the fact the weather in 2024 was quite decent with an extended fall I didn't get to enjoy it much.

My wife and I had a new gazebo installed in our back yard, complete with propane fire pit, and yet we only enjoyed it once or twice. It was meant to bring us joy and share the outdoors, but my summer schedule messed things up.

There was the odd barbecue, but that was it. We added some nice outdoor lights around the back yard and had fun using the new power washer on the patio. If those were entries in my journal, it would be pretty boring.

If someone were to ask me what things, events or even small objects reflected 2024, I'd have to say chemo and my plastic hospital bracelets.

My six-session, four-and-a-half-months-long chemo regime sucked up my weeks from July through November. While I could have dashed off here and there to soak up the sun, it just wasn't in the cards.

I also wasted a lot of time feeling sorry for myself, having my own lonely pity parties. They didn't even include beverages! Frosty, tasty beverages were off the table.

Treks to Southlake became my routine and I got to know the hospital very well. While I tolerated the chemo treatments very well, they came around every three weeks, preceded by blood work. When chemo ended in November, I enjoyed CT and bone scans, which revealed no progression.

Many said that was good news. Well, the ideal news would be a reduction in cancer cells, but alas, my type of cancer is something I will likely have to live alongside forever. Daily meds are currently keeping my PSA levels in check.

I'm currently trying to exercise a bit, drinking plenty of water and taking a handful of supplements aimed at keeping me well. My handy Vibe unit and tuning fork keep me company.

I only missed a handful of days, and went into the office daily.

I keep myself distracted because I have to. It's the only way to keep my demons at bay. They're really good at constantly nagging me, pulling at the tiny hairs on the back of my neck.

So, I spend my idle time playing video games on my phone and watching TV game shows (I'm still not sure what to make of Ryan on Wheel of Fortune). I do have a hobby of painting tiny model aircraft, but I put it on the back-burner lately. Just not feeling it? even though it brought me a small amount of joy.

I will endeavor to get at it as soon as I can.

In 2024, I had a lot of time to reflect. While this is supposed to be a good thing, I'm not sure.

Yes, I counted my blessings, over and over. I saw the beauty in some marvellous summer mornings. I enjoyed some great BBQ meals, a summer staple for our family.

I was open about my cancer with my children and had regular chats. Unfortunately, they did see me at my worst, something I just couldn't hide.

I cried a lot this year.

Someone once said that in our darkest moments, we don't need solutions or advice, but a human connection, a quiet presence and gentle touch.

For some of us, quiet can be dangerous. The gremlins mostly come out at this time, mostly.

Being inside my own head proved problematic so this is one place I have to renovate, update and renew.

When I gave my head a shake, and came around, I did laugh a bit more. I found the humour in life at almost every turn. I enjoyed seeing my kids laugh, poke fun and exchange banter. They even sent some barbs in my direction, commenting on my bald head. Shrek, indeed! I'd say more like Telly Savalas.

There were many late-night conversations on my head, thoughts rolling around like a ball in a pinball machine. I had a few deep chats with the Almighty, in search of strength and guidance.

In 2024, I did learn more about myself. I realized just how frail we humans are and that we can be hit with something major any time. Often there are no explanations or 'whys,' so there's no use spending a lot of time pondering 'what ifs.'

In taking stock of my life, I realized a few gaps - missed opportunities, regrets, lost connections, and a host of bad attitudes. I was overwhelmed with guilt from time to time, thinking about how I could have done better as a husband and a father.

Water under the bridge perhaps, but a current that brought me to where I am today.

I was quite preoccupied this past year, and I only hope that I helped more than I hindered. I wish that I encouraged more smiles than frowns.

Within my family, I really hope I fostered more love, less conflict and further open conversation. Really, there's no value in looking backward and reliving past events and mistakes. I say if you must look back, keep one foot on the gas!

Let's hope 2025 brings us all some clarity, peace of mind and inner strength!