

Learning to enjoy a half-filled glass?

by Mark Pavilons

What is a full life, and conversely, what's a half-lived life?

That's a question that springs to mind lately, when I'm staring at the clock, taking stock.

According to Herman Melville: Perhaps the most devastating scenario imaginable is to face death knowing that because of some imagined fear, you have, you have always chosen a half-lived life in which you avoided doing the things your heart beckoned you to do.

There are many similar quotes from famous people and writers of the 1800s. However, in those days the average lifespan was between 40 and 50, so I wonder just how much living you can do in a mere 25 years, especially if you come from meager or average means.

But the sentiment remains and is often used today.

To what end?

There have been times when I feel like a fraud, trapped in the body of someone else's bad dream. Was I switched at birth? Was it the result of an alien probe gone too far or a 'Freaky Friday' scenario?

Again, such questions pop into my wandering thoughts.

I don't really know how to review, assess or evaluate my rather average life, a half-lived one at that.

Flipping through an old family album, there's a photo of me in my teens in the 1980s. During a trip to Montreal, I posed at some ancient fort with a canon, wearing, get this, aviator glasses, rust-coloured polyester pants and a long-sleeved blue checkered shirt. Oh, and I was sporting long, flowing hair. My brain hurts just thinking about it. Why couldn't the aliens have removed this image from my poor brain?

With the school year starting, I remember those big round clocks in the classroom, when the second hand would get stuck and just tick back and forth without advancing. It was like time stood still. That image is burned into my brain for some reason.

I also remember, not so fondly, when the teacher asked us all to provide a summary of our summer and what we did on our vacation.

I always struggled with this. I never travelled until my late teens so my summers were typically spent doing chores our four-acre property north of Bolton. Parents were reluctant to even take us into town, so it was either riding our bikes on dirt roads for an hour or staying put.

Later, the opportunity for an occasional trip to someone's cottage came up but I recall them being too short and too demanding (the take-charge males always won).

We Boomers stayed within our comfort zones and simply made do. There were few luxuries or extravagant adventures.

This scenario rubs up against my current reality, where, for some weird reason, I picture myself back in the classroom as I am today. 'Mark, what did you do on your summer vacation?' the teacher asks. 'I went for chemo,' is my response.

Not very exciting or adventurous at all. Kinda sad, really, but true.

One more 'lost summer' added to my list.

Living in rural Caledon was, however, a treat in itself, spending lazy, hazy days just chilling, looking at clouds, with a long grass stalk firmly planted in my mouth.

During a recent lunch hour, I had the urge to run down to the parking lot, crank the tunes and lie down on the hood of my car. Boomers will understand.

Jimmy Buffett once said that searching in life is half the fun. 'Life is much more manageable when thought of as a scavenger hunt as opposed to a surprise party.'

And what a surprise it's been.

I don't know of anyone who had their lives completely planned out and strategically implemented. I don't think you can. Every day there's a surprise waiting for you around every corner and past every next step.

Again, Boomers had it simpler, a bit more straight-forward. We went to school, found a trade or profession, choosing from a handful of options. Today, youngsters have thousands of routes to choose from, various certificates, degrees and diplomas. The trick is, and has always been, to find something you love 'the role that makes you want to get out of bed each morning.

I know for our parents, it was a matter of survival, of providing and making a living. They didn't dream of fame or fortune, they merely eked out a living and were content with that. Did they long for more? Likely. Did they live full lives?

When it comes to our car's gas tank, 'they' say to always keep it above half. I think I've been driving on half my entire life, shying away from 'filling it to the top' even when gas was 60-cents per litre. Okay, this analogy isn't really about gas.

I remember clearly, my 1973 Dodge Dart Sport with a slant-6, the ash tray overflowing with butts. I can't count the number of lonely nights I drove home to Eddie Money's 'Take Me Home Tonight.' It was just like Ronnie said.

It's true that half our lives are spent before we truly know what life is.

And then we scramble, in the second half of our stage play, trying to figure out what's important.

Again, lately I've found myself smiling at young parents with their tiny ones; grandpas trying to keep up with their little charges. New life, uncertain of what's in store.

It seems my life went from hum-drum to fast forward in the blink of an eye, taking me to this place, my current perch.

Sure, I recall many of my personal milestones and firsts. But then, all of a sudden, the kids are now adults and my usefulness has waned.

I so long to fill up my glass again. But it's still half-full and chipped, and I cut my lip on it.

Nevertheless, it can be refilled, on a daily basis, with blessings. I've demanded daily hugs from my kids and look for those silver linings.

Let's all raise our glasses and offer cheers, to a life well lived!