

Leave love and memories behind, not things

by Mark Pavilons

"Ooo, cookies!" I exclaimed to myself when I recently opened my lunch, lovingly prepared by my wife.

Such is life's simple pleasures sometimes.

Not overly exciting or earth-shattering, but these tiny chocolate chip specimens brought a smile to my face.

When we near retirement age, I think we quickly take stock, look around, and do some mental math. Maybe we recall our successes and failures, or perhaps we just erase them from life's chalkboard. Who didn't like smacking the chalk board erasers together, creating a cloud of smoke?

It's kind of a full-circle scenario, from classroom to pasture.

My wife has been trying to declutter our home by cleaning, tidying, organizing everything from the evil Tupperware cupboard to the garage, and every nook and cranny in between. As a Virgo, I was once a stickler for order, but have eased off a bit in recent years.

Given my health, I no longer have the energy or desire to wrestle with minor or trivial things.

I look at things much differently around our abode these days.

There's a corner in our bedroom that is earmarked for Mark's junk. It basically consists of a small roll-top desk purchased at a thrift store, a portion of our dresser, a night table and an Ikea glass cabinet for my "collectibles." These tiny treasures consist of small military models and spacecraft, the bulk of which fit in the palm of one's hand.

Years of collecting and hours upon hours of fine details and painting. I still find "playing with toys" to be quite relaxing and it takes my mind off the harsh realities of my world.

Other than these trinkets, there's not much Mark in our house. I fear that when I depart this cruel world, nothing but memories will remain. My tiny toys will be packed up and likely tossed for they have very little monetary value. My other personal belongings like jewellery and watches will be shared among my family members.

I plan to get rid of my junk when the time comes because I don't want my family to be burdened with such a chore.

I have done it several times with relatives of mine who passed, and these were the toughest, and weirdest experiences ever.

I had to clear out my uncle's apartment and it was so strange going through his "stuff." He had a large collection of fancy liquor bottles on a shelf, but most were dust-covered and spoiled. Yes, alcohol can go bad.

With every trip to the dumpster, I felt sad and guilty.

But he lived a full life and other than not having children, he had no regrets.

I had to "tidy up" after my sister and parents passed. Every occasion was a task I would not wish on anyone.

The fact that our lives are reduced to a few boxes and bags of "things" and mementos is a bit disappointing.

For average people, there are no buildings bearing our names, no monuments in our honour and no real evidence of our time spent here on Earth.

Sure, we have family members and children who keep bits of us in their minds and hearts. They may tell a few funny stories to their children one day. There are a few photographs of me during happy times spent with family. And the odd, brief video on a few cell phones.

And that's it.

What will I do when I have to face the final curtain, when my time is up? I don't want to go. I never want to disappear into nothingness, let go and depart without a trace. That's horrible. Go, go where, exactly? Doctor McCoy once asked in a Star Trek movie.

If I knew, I may be somewhat comforted at the prospect. I like to be prepared, all packed, with my toothbrush, pills, a change of clothes and my wallet, just in case.

When I am taken, will I have to leave with the clothes on my back? I have quite the collection of colourful Hawaiian shirts and any one of them would suit me just fine. In the blinding whiteness of the great beyond, I'd be sure to stand out. It won't matter what I'm wearing if the next plateau the next and perhaps final destination is but a black, empty void, a blanket of thick nothingness that wraps around my very soul and sucks every bit of essence from me.

However, in my brief experiences with other worldly concepts and universal energy, there's a glimmer of hope. Many are adamant about an afterlife, an everlasting energy or existence of some sort. The universe is a marvellous, unexplained phenomenon that our puny human brains can't begin to understand, let alone explain.

So, my friends, here's to never-ending sandy beaches, an endless supply of frolicking dogs, and sharing memories with our entire lineage of deceased relatives. That would be quite something, wouldn't it?

Back on Earth, there are times when I question the point of it all. I watch TV game shows, look at flyers for deals on groceries, run errands, meander through the Facebook rabbit hole. I no longer search eBay or Marketplace for more jewellery or baubles to spoil myself. Just more junk to leave behind.

I know that may sound terrible and pessimistic, but folks, it's reality.

As Denzel Washington once said: "You've never seen a U-Haul behind a hearse."

Most of us don't need to accumulate more material things. Fat bank accounts are great, if the government doesn't get its greedy paws on our life savings.

My only advice for the younger ones in our society is to keep an eye on the future, but don't let it consume you. Squeeze every ounce of joy out of life that you can, while you can. You can be replaced at work, but never at home.

Plan, save and show compassion. Travel, climb mountains and soak up nature's beauty. Feel the earth beneath your feet.

Leave pleasant memories and filled hearts behind, not possessions.

And yes, enjoy the cookies!