

Life happens when you're making other plans

by Mark Pavilons

Life, according to Confucius, is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.

Have you ever put the brakes on, stopped and said to yourself "this is my life"?

I had cause to reflect a little on past mistakes and indiscretions recently.

They're there, in the cobwebs of my mind. I put them there, because I didn't really want to face them. But we all know we have to deal with our problems, try to solve them and move forward.

We do this on a daily basis. Most of the time, it works.

But we have moments, or long spells, of self-doubt, a lack of self-confidence, sickness, the death of loved ones, financial woes, and countless hurdles. We're still riding in the steeple-chase of life, through obstacles and over hedges. Sometimes we fall off the horse.

We can take stock, and go through our lives with a fine-tooth comb. I'm not convinced this is overly productive, though. Of course, we all have things, events and decisions we wish we could change, or even erase. Again, the past has to be given the respect and burial it deserves.

Sometimes we have to fall down really hard, even break a few bones, in order to learn some important lessons.

How often do we take out that huge, cartoon-sized magnifying glass and examine our life?

There are times I catch a glimpse of myself, a reflection in the patio doors or hall mirror.

I can tell it's me, yet it's somewhat unfamiliar. At times I look more like a lumbering sasquatch than the dapper journalist you all know and love.

Yes, this is my life and my wearied face is proof that I've been down some rugged roads. I know how I got here, and my arrival at this point in history was often by the grace of God. There's really no other explanation. I could argue that this is exactly where I am supposed to be, that fate directed me to this very time and place. How could it be otherwise?

Sure, I chose my path, made my own decisions and choices. I took a few left turns, perhaps more than I should have. I swerved from time to time. I found love, settled down, raised a family, and the rest is history.

"Regrets, I have a few" as the Sinatra ditty goes, but all in all, "too few to mention."

Regardless of the what-ifs and could-have-beens, at this point in my journey I am blessed with an incredible wife and three amazing children. That's a feat in itself, isn't it? Isn't that remarkable, almost unbelievable at times?

The other day I smiled as my son was putting mineral oil in one of his ears. He was a bit cocked and after chuckling to myself about his predicament (hey, parents are allowed to), I thought to myself "his life is just beginning, I wonder what's in store for him? How will he fare in the real world"?

We all want the best for our offspring. We try to plan and chart the best course, being careful at each step of the way. But as we know, there will be hurdles, doubts, challenges, pain, tears, love and laughter. Those are the unique ingredients of our lives, like a

tossed salad of sorts.

He's still in a bit of a tug-of-war with his future career path. He knows he has to make a living, and he wants to earn a decent pay cheque. He also loves his friends, travelling and song-writing. He's a teen.

We hope he's headed for some sort of post-secondary education or trade school.

Lexie, who graduates this spring, has spent four amazing years expanding her horizons at Western University. Alas, she too, is at a crossroads, as most graduates are.

She sent us a note recently, after brooding about her impending life.

She noted she's always valued and appreciated education but now, after four years of academia, she wonders how to put that to practical use in the real world.

Lexie said she's torn between pursuing her master's degree or literally getting out and starting her journey.

Who remembers that feeling?

She feels 'semi-accomplished' and longs to be with people she became close with 'connections she made in a convent in the Dominican Republic, or the school in Rwanda. She's warmed by the souls in the remote village of Matelot in Trinidad.

They would tell her it's all worth it and even if every moment is not perfect, her 'semi-accomplishment' is a success and a privilege.

Lexie longs to be 'free,' free to continue her mission work and free to spread joy, hope and faith throughout the world. She wants to contribute.

She's torn between this need to volunteer and give, and the necessity to earn a living.

Existentialist Albert Camus remarked that you will never be happy if you're constantly looking for the meaning of life. Life is a succession of riddles, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, and Plato believed that life should be lived as 'play.'

I recall, quite vividly, my first year of college, when we had the desire and umph to change the world, to right wrongs and change people's thinking with words. We were crusaders, armed with righteousness.

Decades later and millions of words pounded out and I'm still not convinced I achieved those initial goals.

Life gets in the way, I'm told, when you're making other plans!

Again, we have to determine what our path is, and whether we want to be defined by our career choice, or by the content of our inner selves, our characters.

Who's to say what experience, what job, what journey yields the best results?

This is our life. There are still a few puzzle pieces missing, perhaps the most important ones. Those empty spaces on the massive, living mosaic could be the most wondrous.

I'm in no rush to fill the remainder of the tiles, but I'm anxious to see how it all turns out!