

Make a Memory

by BRIAN LOCKHART

There's a small town I used to visit when returning from my travels in the northern part of Central Ontario.

In many ways it is a non-descript place, but it still has a lot of charm.

You pass a park as you enter the town where you would see local kids bobbing about on inner tubes on a man-made lake on a hot summer day. There's a path that runs through the park and crosses over the dam providing a picturesque place where the water cascades into the lower river.

Entering the town, the main road goes down a hill leading to the business district.

At the bottom of the hill there is a popular local restaurant. It isn't fine dining ? it's picnic tables, a flat roof, part ice cream parlor, part burger joint and part fish and chips.

I can't remember the first time I stopped there, but it impressed me enough that it became a habit that I would time my travels to arrive in town around dinner time so I could order a burger and fries and sit at one of the tables and just enjoy the surroundings and the tranquility of small-town life. And the burgers are really good.

When friends were with me, I would convince them we had to stop there on the way home.

One summer I noticed the first few houses entering the town had blue and white ribbons hanging from the front porch.

I saw the same colour ribbons hanging from trees in the park and at the top of the hill.

By the time I got into town, I noticed all the buildings, trees, and lampposts were festooned in blue and white.

I pulled the car into the familiar restaurant parking lot. An older couple pulled in beside me.

Pointing at the ribbons, I asked them what was going on.

?It's homecoming weekend!? the man said enthusiastically.

Apparently it's a tradition there, that this one weekend every summer, those that have left the town for greener pastures return to their home town to see old friends, family, and reminisce about what was special about growing up there.

It's those memories of youth, and growing up, and meeting friends at the park to go swimming, and diving off the dock, that are in the back of your mind and buried in your heart forever.

We are currently living in a difficult, challenging, and stressful time.

This holiday season, in many ways, will be very different than any we have seen in the past.

Holiday parties have been canceled or never planned in the first place. Private gatherings are discouraged if not downright illegal.

Many Christmas dinners this season, will be immediate family only, not the traditional gathering of in-laws, extended family, and those cousins you only see at holidays and special events.

Somehow a Secret Santa gift exchange isn't as much fun when there's only three of you.

It does seem strange that you can be in violation of a law and risk being fined by the state for being the sixth person at a holiday meal.

For many people, Christmas can be a lonely time of year ? even in a good year. Not everyone has family they can rely on or look forward to seeing.

Some of us lost family members this year and will be celebrating the season with a heavy heart.

Many people already suffering with mental health issues can feel a crush of loneliness and depression when the holidays arrive.

I know a few people who won't be able to travel to see their family and friends and will most likely be spending Christmas alone.

Maybe this is the year we can all make a little extra effort and reach out to those who won't be with family when the turkey is served and brighten their day with just a few words or a gesture of thoughtfulness.

It works in the movies, but quite often those movie moments never translate to real life.

It doesn't take a lot of effort to make a phone call or buy one extra gift that can be placed on a porch with a note of encouragement.

In spite of these desperate times and dark days, we can still have a holiday filled with new memories that people will remember for a lifetime.

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.