

## Mixed emotions during family gatherings

by Mark Pavilons

Dear Mom, Dad and Sis;

It's been a long time since I thought about you guys. What can I say, I'm not the best at multi-tasking! Life is much more hectic since we last saw one another.

But recently I've taken time to pause, reflect and smile. Lexie brought out one of her albums to show family photos to her boyfriend and it was a weird stroll down memory lane.

On my way to work the other day, I scanned my brain for images of each one of you laughing and it brought a huge smile to my face. I felt calm, almost content.

As Kim and Liam blew out their birthday candles recently, we all pondered the small, and not so small, milestones in our lives.

There have been a few such celebrations in recent years, events you all missed through no fault of your own.

I haven't had much time to direct my thoughts to you recently ? our three trouble-makers are a handful, and I only have two hands!

You are likely keeping an eye on us from your heavenly perch ? hopefully, it's a massive garden in perpetual full bloom, or a reclining chair on an endless tropical beach.

In case you haven't had time to catch up, or simply weren't permitted by the Big Guy, I'll fill you in on a few things.

Lexie, our first-born, is set to graduate from university. Boy, how time flies. The past four years, with her being away in London, Ontario, has been interesting and challenging at times. It meant many long hauls, one or two late nights to tend to a sick child, armed with soup!

Lexie would squeeze the stuffings out of all of you if only she could. I know she would spend hours telling you about her travels and volunteer work around the world. I hope you're proud.

I know it's not practical, but please blow her a kiss from the clouds, and ease her stress and uncertainty as she enters the real world. Maybe you could merely dust off her shoulders.

Liam, our clan's only boy, extinguished 19 candles recently. OMG (that means Oh My God).

While he's stubborn and argumentive, he's filled with curiosity and questions about the past, future, life, death and the infinity of the universe. He loves to have fun, enjoys a good steak and wants to experience everything life has to offer.

When he laughs from the belly, the walls shake and I smile, even if I'm trying to get to sleep. Ah, the laugh of a child is pretty much unmatched by anything in the tangible world.

Perhaps his squeals of joy penetrate the Pearly Gates from time to time, turning heads! Feel free to tell the others he's related to you!

He's still trying to find his way in life and both Kim and I are doing our best to guide him in the right direction. Did I mention he was stubborn?

The other night I told him not to fret ? he's loved, has food, shelter, friends, a loving family, part-time job and a car. His future will unfold as it should.

Dad, you never got a chance to see your only grandson. And it saddens me that you never got to know him. I know you'd be impressed by his tall stature and broad shoulders. He would have loved you for all your flaws.

He's likely missed that connection and if there's any celestial way possible, send him a sign or drop by for a visit, if only to look into his eyes for a few moments and see what's in his heart.

Kyleigh, our youngest prodigy, is a spunky child, with more moxie than the other two combined! We only wish she'd use her powers for good, not planting her feet firmly on the ground and placing her hands on her hips, taunting us to try to move her.

As the third born, she's likely heaping on the assertiveness to assume her rightful place in the family hierarchy and be noticed. Oh, she's noticed all right!

She's also a fast learner and has a passion for art and music. She wants to be a veterinarian, she likes bling and doesn't mind it all to be the centre of attention, and to be spoiled rotten.

Mom, she felt your departure profoundly for such a small child. It's been 10 years and she still thinks of you often and sheds a tear now and then, recalling the times you spent together. Last week, as Kim's dad was bouncing back from a minor stroke, the emotions and memories came flooding back. Fortunately, this scenario played out much better than what you had to endure, mom.

Kyleigh wonders why? I don't break down or talk about you guys much. I suppose some more frequent talks about our family tree are warranted.

Mom and Dad, I hope your time on earth was well spent, and you're pleased with how some things have turned out.

While my life isn't as charmed as I would have hoped, I am trying and remain optimistic. Kim is our rock and I think we both have to let more roll off of our shoulders.

I have no shortage of intestinal fortitude, but outside stresses and frustrations take their toll from time to time.

Now that you're up there, you likely know that these things are unimportant in the grand scheme of things.

Mom and Dad, thanks for laying the groundwork for all that has unfolded around me. I may not be the Dr. Spock of child-rearing or fatherhood, or the Dr. Phil in the husband department, but perhaps my style will suffice.

Maybe you're both there, just beyond the scope of human vision, standing behind us, with hands firmly placed on our shoulders.

Thinking of you!