

Observations from inside looking out

by Mark Pavilons

Looks, outward appearances, are for other people.

A realization dawned on me the other day, one that may change the way we look at ourselves, or rather, glance outward.

I don't have a concrete idea of what I look like.

The other day I watched the beginning of a sci-fi movie on Netflix. The main character's lifeless double is found on the floor. He turns the body over and he's shocked to find out it's him.

I thought about this for a minute. If I found a body on the floor, turned it over, I wouldn't readily recognize myself. I'd turn his head left and right, study it, and then sigh, wondering to myself if that's really what I look like.

Let me qualify.

I spend maybe 90 seconds looking in the mirror in the morning, and another 90 seconds at night, while brushing my teeth. The rest of the day, I never check myself out.

Our brains are our internal computers ? they are everything we are. We perceive, judge, weigh, decide and calculate everything by what we see. Our eyes flip the information to our brains, where the whole process takes place.

We glance downward at our hands, arms, legs and feet. But we can't look at our faces, unless we stand in front of a mirror, a reversed image of our real selves.

If we never look in a mirror, or lose our eyesight, how do we know what we look like? Is our mental picture of our appearance burned into our brains??Is it slightly different than the real deal?

For some, they have a mountain of photos of themselves, perhaps even videos, where they can see themselves in all their glory. They can watch themselves in action.

I joke to my wife that during my wake, the room will be somewhat void of photos. I don't have many of myself ?? don't like them. Sure, there may be half a dozen family shots but very few depictions of this outstanding man exist.

You will notice that I have a graphic, a cartoon, of myself at the top of this column. I did have photos in my younger days at the Caledon?Citizen, but tossed that idea as I aged, not so gracefully.

Wait, there's more.

If no photos of ourselves existed, the only ?images? would be from other people's minds. Everyone perceives things differently. Does that mean we look slightly different to each person we know and love? I'd say yes. So what's our true form?

Good question, indeed.

About 15 years ago, I developed a condition known as rhinophyma, characterized by a large, red, bumpy or bulbous nose. This condition is significantly more common in men, especially between the ages of 50 to 70 years. I contracted it in my early 40s.

It worsened gradually, and to me, when I looked in the mirror, I saw the same careworn face. Others did not. In fact, I can honestly say it startled a few passers-by.

It required surgery to correct and my youngest referred to as the time I got my 'new nose'.

Again, this is a matter of perception, which is obviously subjective. Do we see what is actually there?

My whole life shows on my face and I'm damn proud of every wrinkle, dent and irregularity. I've earned them all.

I look my wife's face. In the past 25 years of marriage, I don't think it's changed one iota. She has the same bright smile and cute laugh. Everything about her seems perfect.

I don't know what she sees when she looks in the mirror. But does it matter?

There's the question we should all be asking ourselves 'Does it matter what I look like?'

Aesop once wrote that we should look to the mind, not the outward appearance.

And Bryant McGill observed that while many show discontentment with their looks, few show it regarding their intelligence. 'I, however, assure you there are many more plain minds than faces,' he said.

I've heard that many Hollywood stars don't like how they look on film. Many don't watch their own movies or TV shows.

Looks, by and large, are genetic and by design. There's very little we can do to alter them, despite the thousands of infomercials claiming otherwise. It's the luck of the draw, the hand you're dealt with.

But doesn't that make you truly unique and one of a kind? Isn't that something to celebrate?

Shakespeare once observed that God gave us one face, and yet we make another.

Here in the 'civilized' world, looks are king. They are everything, especially in advertising, entertainment and furthering the affluent gene pool.

Again, our brains may disregard the useless information we absorb. It only processes and stores new information, something interesting or visually appealing. Everything else falls by the wayside.

And so it should.

I'm a big fan of things that are remarkable by being 'out of place.' I love creative photos or artwork that depict dichotomies or contradictions.

I love it when people stand on the sidewalk with signs and I'm drawn to the ones that indicate the Messiah has arrived and the end is near.

I suppose my point is we don't have to be aesthetically pleasing to be important or make a difference. I say ban all mirrors, photos, selfies, videos, even for just a day. Let's all walk around as if we're new to the species, meeting one another for the very first time.

I'd say things like 'Oh my, what a well deserved face you have. Tell me what's behind it.'

Let the stories flow.