

Our personal worlds shrink as we get older

by MARK PAVILONS

"Aging has a wonderful beauty and we should have respect for that." - Eartha Kitt

Celine Dion says we gain knowledge as we grow older and "it's beautiful."

When we age, a lot of strange things happen. There's the obvious, that physically we're not as agile or spry as we once were. Sure, we can still get out of bed in the morning, it's getting off the floor that's hard!

Our body parts don't fall just so anymore. Some have fallen and simply "can't get up." I would say we're becoming more "majestic."

Yes, my friends, there's a lot going on inside those Hawaiian shirts and stretchy pants of anyone over 50. I like to think of my body as a gift, a miraculous sculpture that combines the artistry of Picasso and beauty of Shrek.

In photos, I still see some beauty there. When my wife I pose together, her sparkle and youthful glow bounces off this weathered mug and actually brings it to life. For me, I think it's a matter of picking up my chin and receiving the light in a better way.

You can exercise and eat berries to delay cognitive aging. You can take supplements, meditate and take up yoga. You can stretch.

For me, I'm quite fond of my crinkles, those well dug laugh lines. Laughter has always been medicinal and it's one of the greatest gifts in life. It's what makes us human and keeps us healthy. They say a few minutes of laughter each day is like a brisk 15-minute walk.

Rack up those miles, people!

When we age, it seems that many things shrink.

By that I mean our social circles tend to diminish "our friends and relatives are aging, too. Their lives are busy with their own children and grandchildren. It's harder for others to make plans to visit, or set aside time for lunch or dinner.

Family gatherings alter dramatically as the members of this cherished collective begin to age.

I remember, with fondness, regular get-togethers with Kim's extended family. What a bunch!

We looked forward to these events, mostly because of the homemade roti, curry and cookup rice. There were aunts, uncles, cousins and the odd lion, tiger and bear, too.

These highly sought-after affairs have diminished to the point where only memories remain.

You hear in passing of a family member's health concerns, and those who've lost loved ones to this or that.

And then families gather again, at funerals and weddings.

You try to stay connected through texts, emails and social media.

But it's not the same.

Just ask any senior who lives alone.

There are mainly ghosts on the Pavilons side of the ledger, save an uncle and a couple of cousins. Haven't seen them in years. My friends, well, I only ever had a handful mostly chums from high school. They're spread out a bit, and yes, busy with work, raising families and such. One was lucky to retire early and he and his wife recently moved to Alberta. It's okay, though, he reads my columns online and enjoys my tidbits of wisdom.

I exchange emails and Facebook posts with another friend, an ex-military man. We haven't been able to meet up in person in many years, but we try to stay connected.

One of my other friends calls on a regular basis, to just catch-up.

Guys don't really have to do much to show each other we care. We think and ponder, but don't dwell. While I haven't seen any of them in quite some time, all I have to do is think back, on special times we shared, and the smiles reappear on my face. And that's a good feeling.

I doubt any of us could partake in bar-hopping like we once did. And borrowing airplane parts from a neighbour's lawn is now out of the question (a long story this one).

All the stupid things we did as young adults still make me smile. It's part of who I am, or at least who I was.

And that, too, is a good feeling.

As we age, it seems such small moments, even trivial things, are that much more dear.

I hold them tight to my chest as I fade off to sleep, perchance to dream, every night.

I envy those who have strong circles of friends and loved ones, who gather and share on a regular basis. I love seeing those extra long outdoor tables, laid out for family feasts. I smile when I see Facebook posts from acquaintances who entertain at cottages, or besties who travel together.

For many, though, such circles are finite, even closing in on themselves.

It's not so much age, as time itself, a universal constant that we just can't fiddle with.

And then there are the kids, who have become adults themselves. They may not require constant attention, but they're still our offspring. Parents have this duty to ensure their continual wellbeing. It's challenging, often difficult and, yes, time-consuming.

Frankly, if our kids were tossed from the nest and soaring on their own, I don't know what Kim and I would do. Of course, we're anxious to find out!

For moms, that attachment never wanes and it's always present. For some dads, including yours truly, my recliner on the never-ending beach of happiness awaits. I'm with Clint Eastwood on this: Aging can be fun if you lay back and enjoy it.

Age makes us bold, beautiful, wise and experienced.

Each one of us is a book, a made-for-TV special in the works.

My one piece of advice is explore and widen those social circles, before they close for good!