

Playing my own personal version of Jenga

by Mark Pavilons

There are days when I feel like I'm playing life-size Jenga with myself.

Each new piece added to the top makes the structure unsteady, ready to topple.

Maybe it's the change of seasons and the chilly weather descending upon us. Maybe it's a case of transition, moving forward yet being somewhat stuck.

Even though I had the opportunity to ring the bell, ending my chemo treatment, it seemed rather sombre and low-key. No fanfare, no crowds, no confetti or balloons, like those shown on TV medical dramas.

Just my wife and I, wrapping up one unfortunate chapter and moving on to the next.

Just what that will be remains uncertain, unknown. Upcoming scans will determine my condition and whether further treatment is required. I do know this is not over, not by a long shot. My cancer is not curable, so it will be my Jenga partner from here on in.

Inducted into the Toy Hall of Fame in 2020, Jenga is derived from kujenga, a Swahili word which means 'to build.' For those who've played it, it can also mean to 'topple quite vigorously.'

Perhaps it's a sign, that I'm to build upon the past and move forward. But like moves in this game of blocks, my steps are filled with trepidation, like walking through a proverbial mine field.

While the recent Thanksgiving gathering and meals shared with loved ones filled me with joy, reality has a way of stopping you in its tracks, slapping you in the face.

Calming sounds still play from my computer at work, and soon I will be back to my previous routine, trying to live a healthier lifestyle, taking supplements and even using a newly acquired tuning fork. Just as my oncologists said, I'm going to throw everything I can at this thing, this menace, to try to extend my time here on earth.

I quite like it here, even though daily living is already filled with challenges. Pessimistically, I see prices of groceries, dog food, vet bills, car repairs and upcoming holiday shopping as annoyances. While we've all tried, I don't think we can spend our way to a level of happiness.

I don't think positive thinking alone will give us the steady hands to place the next block atop the growing tower of Jenga.

It would be perfectly fine if I constructed the Jenga tower on my own. But so many external forces have a role to play in adding to its height and instability. Blocks seem to pop out of nowhere, leaping to the top of the structure at a moment's notice.

This thing is a great metaphor on life. Each piece has to be weighed and valued on its significance. Some are vitally important to the foundation, keeping everything stable. You have to know which ones to keep and which ones to get rid of.

My wife is my rock and the cornerstone of our family. While getting it from all sides, she maintains order, tries to keep everything on track. She has plenty of sound advice to dispense and often cools simmering heads.

Her pieces must stay in my Jenga building.

The next few are laid by my own hands, but they may not be as solid. My wife is the special one, and I tend to make things fit. Ideally, the blocks I place are good enough to withstand the forces of nature and passage of time. Hopefully, they are thoughtfully placed, making them important to the overall picture.

As the structure is climbing skyward, it's important to know which pieces are irreplaceable and which can be discarded, without affecting the overall cohesion. It's all about balance, they say.

Just like life, we have to balance everything that comes our way ? our jobs, finances, households, vehicles, children, pets and groceries. Each is unique and has their special place in the big picture.

It can be trial and error, deciding which pieces can be removed before the whole thing comes tumbling down. But some must be tossed, so they don't negatively impact our lives and the monument we're building.

Negative things and negative people fall into this category. Toss them aside, I say!

Jenga teaches us that sometimes, you have to let go of what's holding you back to move forward.

We Boomers may have laid the ground work for the generations that follow. And yet, many of us are only now (in our late 50s and early 60s) getting a handle on things. I don't know all the answers and I don't really get the meaning of life, but I'm a lot closer than I was a decade ago.

Part of this newfound knowledge comes from others ??ve met thousands of fascinating people in my line of work. I've been able to pick up countless tidbits to help me shape things.

The Internet also offers countless resources, from psychology papers to self-help advice and metaphysical experiences. I recently learned about the healing effects of sounds, and those produced by tuning forks.

I don't know if 128 Hz will actually restore balance, promote relaxation, and aid my body's natural healing processes. But it's worth a try. Many people believe the vibrations produced by the tuning forks help balance the body's energy, and support overall health by resonating with the body's natural frequencies.

Will it help steady my balance during my Jenga journey?

I believe that we should draw upon our strengths and use everything at our disposal, to combat the daily challenges. Whether it's vitamin supplements, meditation, long walks in the woods, or rough-housing with the dogs, we can be steadfast in our approach and our journeys.

At the end of the day, life is not a game a chess. It's flipping Jenga!