

Putting family first on Father's Day

by Mark Pavilons

I deflected attention from myself to my family this past weekend.

I wanted to enjoy Father's Day by enjoying them. Nothing makes a parent's heart swell than seeing their kids happy, smiling, laughing, getting along.

I was fresh off my fifth chemo treatment, so this weekend wasn't the ideal time to celebrate. You tend to feel sluggish post-chemo, Plus, this time around, my taste buds took a beating and I lost a lot of my appetite.

I can't tell you just how sad I was not to have beer and BBQ on Father's Day. My forward-thinking daughter managed to get me a bevy of non-alcoholic beer to try.

But again, this day wasn't about me, it was about my children. They are what make me a father and they are my raison d'etre and my legacy, each and every one.

It's strange to reflect on the development of our children, when they're still a distance from full maturity.

My oldest daughter is ready to start the next chapter of her life, living with her boyfriend in their newly purchased home. The house-hunting experience and final purchasing details were frustrating and stressful, but that's the process. You become all the wiser for sure.

They saw some nice homes and some real dumps for what they were asking. It's next to impossible to find anything in the \$700k range in this part of Ontario.

At this stage of her life, I feel my work is largely done. I've tried to be there for her and have her back, giving her all the special ingredients she needed while growing up. Treating them well at a young age, is key. She's now assertive, smart, focused, pragmatic, frugal and determined. Not sure I was all those things at 28. I know I'm still missing a few of those things today.

Our Father's Day plans were a bit awry, so we spread out our evenings together with small activities. I don't have the emotional or physical energy to engage in much.

One of my suggestions was a family album night, where we look through old photos in albums and on various smart phones as a journey down memory lane. It generated a lot of smiles and laughs and that's what I was fishing for, since there were no chicken wings within sight.

Our kids fondly remember the 10-plus summers we spent at the Delawana Inn at Honey Harbour. Those were magical times and our children grew, literally, from toddlers to young adults over that decade. This family friendly resort and its staff helped shape our clan in so many ways. The times are etched in their minds and memories, and likely will be forever.

I remembered when Liam caught his first fish, on a misty dock. I remember the pontoon boat rides and family entertainment nights.

I loved providing what I could for my family over the years. I was never able to jet them off to far-away lands, but some of them made it there on their own, with our support of course.

I wish they could continue their world travels while they can. It's so important to witness this planet's beauty, first-hand.

Of course, judging from comments made from visitors to WorldCup soccer games, once-in-a-lifetime experiences can be quite costly. Many are throwing caution to the wind just to wrap themselves up in these amazing adventures. And good for them.

My time for adventures is pretty much over, or so I believe. I mentioned to my family that should my cancer invade my spine, I don't want them pushing me around in a wheelchair. But resting in the sand, looking out at the lake on some sandy Ontario shore does have its appeal. At least at low tide!

In a pre-Father's Day fit of depression, I apologized to my family for being a burden, and not living up to my end of the bargain ? to always remain calm, mellow and supportive. Maybe my fate is a fitting end to a mediocre life.

I find an occasion like Father's Day can place undue stress on family members. Just how do you show your dad how much you love and appreciate them with a card and an endless supply of ribs? Ok, it's a great start!

For most men, especially Boomers, they never shared their deep feelings with their dads. My dad kept a lot close to his vest and his pain turned into silence. I never fully understood him.

Our I love yous were few and far between. But when spoken aloud, they mattered. It was enough.

For me, though, I dish them out like candy to my offspring, every day and night before bed. I never want them to feel they are not loved. I would hug the stuffings out of them if they would let me, but you know these Millennials.

I don't know how deeply they hurt inside regarding my prognosis. I struggle with it so much every day in my own mind that I don't consider the impacts on my family members. I believe talking about it makes it more real, more painful, and they shouldn't have to go through that.

My oldest said I should embrace every good moment and each new day as it comes.

Easier said than done.

My wife bought me a new reclining sofa to help make things more comfortable for me. She stayed up until 3 a.m. searching Marketplace until she found it. And the Boyds came to our rescue with pick-up and delivery.

One thing I would tell my kids is that they never had to earn my love ? it was theirs from the beginning. It was my honour and privilege to be their dad.

They, like all of us on this tiny blue ball floating in space, are miracles. Our existence is against all odds.

Kim often tells me about my characteristics shining through our young ones.

I seldom see it, because I see them as unique individuals with amazing qualities.

They are future, builders of the new world.

Any part I played in making that happen is just a bonus. I enjoyed every second.

As they continue to grow and mature, they will all leave the nest and set out to explore the world.

That is how it should be.

They are solid, smart, funny, compassionate, loving individuals. I still can't believe I'm partially responsible for all of that.

My job may be largely done, but that's not to say I'm ready to leave this place. I only hope I have a couple more Father's Days to enjoy and reflect upon.