

Putting our 'First World' woes in perspective

by MARK PAVILONS

As we enter the holidays and emerge from our burrows, we face some new and old challenges.

These hurdles, however, are solely First World issues, and are so petty and trivial in the grand scheme of things.

Recently I misplaced my keys, that one key chain containing all the important metal widgets. But this one was special: it has a mini-Swiss Army knife and my No Frills shopping cart token!

I remember being frantic for most of the day, pondering what I would do without these precious baubles. I thought of the massive pain of replacing these lost keys and the stress it would bring me.

And then, as the hours passed, I collected my thoughts and merely took it in stride.

'If that's the worst that can happen to me today, I'm so damn lucky,' I thought to myself. There was a happy ending to the story when my aging brain cells kicked in and the hiding place of the previously lost keys was revealed.

But the lesson was not lost on yours truly.

Most of our minor, daily annoyances are really diddly. Waiting in line for gas, missing out on Black Friday sales, having to settle for a different kind of processed cheese slices.

We are living in a very bountiful country and province. We really want for little.

And yet, we're still preoccupied with the non-sequitur, the insignificant, trite and superficial. We're masters of the immaterial and friends of the frivolous.

I stress out all the time about bills, insurance rates and cost of living.

Do I really need snow tires? What kind of snacks should we get for the holidays? What cologne goes with casual everyday?

Again, the woes of the western world.

If you can read my column, you are more fortunate than the 3 billion illiterate souls on this planet.

If you have food in the fridge, clothes on your back and a roof over your head, you are more fortunate than 75% of people in the world.

If you woke up healthy this morning, you're much better off than the 1 million people who will die this week.

And if you never experienced war, imprisonment, torture or starvation, you are luckier than 500 million people who are alive and suffering at this very moment.

I noticed a smell in my car that lingered for several days. It was that of a fresh, assorted sub sandwich. Must be remnants of a street vendor sausage on a bun my wife and I shared during chores recently. Made me hungry every time I got in my car.

Oh, that's right, I have a car. In fact, my family owns several. And I can go to the store to get a sandwich whenever I want.

There are billions around the world who cannot say the same.

As we gear up for the holidays and gift-giving, overabundance always springs to mind.

?That's what it's all about, isn't it? That's what it's always been about. Gifts, gifts ? gifts, gifts, gifts, gifts, gifts! You wanna know what happens to your gifts? They all come to me. In your garbage. You see what I'm saying? In your garbage. I could hang myself with all the bad Christmas neckties I found at the dump. And the avarice. The avarice never ends!?! Famous words from Jim Carrey's character in *The Grinch*.

In my family's case, it's never about wanting more. It's about making do and being frugal. But as parents, we have this never-ending desire to help our offspring, ensure their success and give them all they need for a good, head start.

Well, that head start is more uphill today than ever before. The pandemic didn't create economic uncertainty, but it sure kicked it in the nether regions.

The holidays are a time for sharing, spending time with family and counting our plethora of blessings.

The main one is simply being here. Again, we are the lucky ones.

Think about it. A ?bent? or ?broken? family tree generations ago and we could have ended up being born to poor, developing world parents. Or, the worst-case scenario ? we wouldn't have been born at all.

But we are here, today, talking about these things. This very fact meant our ancestors survived ? they overcame horrible odds; beat disease, starvation and the spoils of war; lived through The Plague or the influenza outbreak at the end of the First World War that claimed 50-70 million lives.

Generations of families perished and literally millions of family trees vanished from the history books.

But you and I survived, somehow. Our distant relatives escaped to continue on. Is this by luck, by design or some divine intervention?

Every day when our feet touch the ground and we get out of bed, we should be grateful. Sure, life is tough sometimes, maybe all the time. If it were easy, we wouldn't be talking about it all.

We are living in a society of haves and have-nots, with the gap ever widening.

Yes, I have burdens. But those don't prevent me from being generous or compassionate. They don't prohibit me from gathering donations, several times of year, for the less fortunate.

My oldest daughter made a special trip to London, ON, with a carload of clothes and toys for various shelters in that city. Who does that?

I?think back to my parents, who maintained their door was always open. They were always ready and willing to welcome friends and strangers, offering them a meal and hospitality.

I am thankful for growing up with that mentality.

And I?am blessed.

It's our responsibility to share the wealth, spread joy and help others count their blessings, too. If we all did this on a regular basis, who knows how far we can go.