

Questions and Regrets

by BROCK WEIR

It's often said that it's preferable to regret the things one has done rather than the things one has not.

It's a quote often attributed to Lucille Ball, almost without exception, but like so many comments and quips attributed to such luminaries as Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, and Mark Train, to pick just three, many have lined up to take credit.

And that's really no surprise; as far as pearls of wisdom go, it's pretty solid insight.

After all, if you regret something that you haven't done, or something that will invariably remain a hypothetical for the remainder of your days the gnawing unknowns and what-ifs probably aren't worth it.

Despite our best efforts, I would wager that each and every one of us has at least one regret in either column. Maybe it's a matter of not recognizing an opportunity until it was too late; or taking what felt like the correct tine in a fork in the road at any given period of time, only to find that perhaps things would have been a little different had you veered to the left; or what further forks may have presented themselves if you just had the wherewithal to strike up a conversation with that person across the room.

It's not just a matter of missed opportunities.

Words, and how they're used, can be a minefield ? even if you don't realize it at the time.

In this combative age we're living in, ?It's a free country? or cries of ?Free speech!? are common refrains ? even if in this country ?free speech? is not a Charter Right ? the moment anyone receives the slightest degree of push-back on what they've spouted. Yet, fewer and fewer people these days seem inclined to take a moment to consider the true impact of their words.

Words, for some, can be water off a duck's back. For others, they can stick and have a cascading affect in someone's life ? and any subsequent regrets often come about when it's too late to do anything about it.

The sheer number of reasonably anonymous ways we can communicate with each other, particularly on social media behind the shield of a fake profile photo, the reflection of sunglasses, or from beneath the brim of a sloganned baseball cap, has only emboldened these actors and exacerbated an already problematic situation.

Yet, whether it's a missed opportunity, or reflecting on the impact of one's actions, no matter how small and inconsequential it might feel at the time, the common factor is hindsight. It doesn't, of course, need to be 20/20 ? any amount of true reflection will do.

I know I have some regrets related to both things I have done and things I have not done, but one particular regret I have this week is not asking enough questions.

That might seem like a strange confession for a journalist ? after all, by and large, we're paid to ask the tough questions ? but what we're bold enough to do in our workplace or vocation doesn't necessarily translate to our lives out from behind a desk.

On Monday, for instance, I woke up early to watch events in the United Kingdom commemorating the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day.

Watching these ceremonies has become something of an inadvertent tradition.

Interest in events such as these was, perhaps, stoked by my maternal grandmother.

My paternal grandparents didn't often speak of their wartime experiences ? for example, throughout the entire time I shared this earth with them, they insisted that due to wartime shortages there were no photographs taken of their 1941 nuptials in Moosomin, SK.

But, for whatever reason, this line turned out to be far removed from the truth as, while we packed up their things when it was time to downsize, I found an entire shoebox of photos commemorating the day, from their living room wedding, to their glamorous honeymoon departure, my grandmother swathed in enough furs to make Cruella de Vil green with envy.

The other branch of the family tree was far more forthcoming with their own experiences.

The 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day was celebrated on May 8, 1995, which just happened to be my grandmother's 70th birthday. While I got to take the day off of school to celebrate her milestone, what I remember most is sitting in front of the TV with her as a 10-year-old asking questions about the Second World War ? and her, having lived through it, putting her birthday celebrations briefly on the backburner to share whatever she could.

As someone with the lived experience, she was moved at the sight of Queen Elizabeth II, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, and Princess Margaret returning to the Buckingham Palace balcony to revisit the iconic image of the trio ? then joined by King George VI and Winston Churchill ? celebrating such a pivotal moment in history.

She explained why people were so moved by Dame Vera Lynn taking the stage on the ground below to sing the melodies so many found comfort in during those dark times a half-century before.

Some 30 years on ? an expanse of time that really didn't hit me until after the ceremonies came to a close ? I have so many more questions, including how those that were there would view today's political climate, but precious few ways to get these living, breathing answers.

My grandmother is gone, the five ? and then three ? who appeared on the balcony are gone, so many of the veterans who were so moved on May 8, 1995 are gone, and these events are very quickly fading from living memory.

It's a natural progression, of course, but we lose so much with each passing year ? and for those of us lucky enough to still have friends and relatives able to share, it's important to ask these questions while we still have the chance.

And it's not just a matter of asking questions of those who lived through conflict. The questions we might have for any individual are unique to ourselves, informed by our experiences and interests, and we can all benefit from asking them ? whatever generation they might hail from.

Had I started research into my own family tree far earlier than university, my grandparents might have regretted any part they took in teaching me how to talk, or have been tempted to turn off their respective hearing aids at the umpteenth ?Do you remember when?..?? but it's definitely a worthwhile exercise.

Mother's Day is this weekend and there is no better time to take a few minutes to think of burning questions you might have and how you can take this opportunity to broach them. And, for all of our sakes, write them down for posterity. We'll all benefit.

Now, if only I could get to the bottom of just what the circumstances of my paternal grandparents' wedding photos were for them to be shrouded in mystery, denied their very existence, for the better part of sixty years.

Hope I didn't miss something really spicy!