

## Searching for what's right in front of us

by MARK PAVILONS

I've become a bit more pensive in recent weeks.

On a drive to work, I stopped at a light and just stared into the distance. The wind blew gently, the trees swayed and grass danced.

It's a common thing, a little thing. But a miracle of sorts.

I soaked up all I could in the minute or so I had available.

I looked down at my gas gauge and thought, if I only had a full tank, I'd continue driving. I'd drive for as long as I could, until I found peace or ran out of gas, whichever came first.

But I couldn't do it.

I'm bound by rules, societal norms, expectations, duties and responsibilities.

I thought for a moment, while listening to classics on 97.3, about peaceful moments. Just how do we find peace, some solace, in our hectic lives? Just where do we find an empty spot in our daytimers or wall calendars?

Everybody wants a happy life and a peaceful mind, but we have to produce peace of mind through our own practice, according to the Dalai Lama.

He believes that if one's life is simple, contentment has to come. Simplicity is the key. We need to limit, reduce or do away with excess and be okay with having 'just enough' in our daily lives.

There's the rub. Is anyone's life today simple?

Are we victims of the massive hamster wheel we've created, or are we on a never-ending loop of self-fulfilling prophecies? In other words, do we sabotage our own lives and make them more complicated than they need to be?

The funny thing is we're always looking for peace in our lives. That's the mistake right there.

It already exists, we don't have to search for it. We merely have to see it, dust it off, clear away the branches. Enjoy the breeze while you can.

Many swear that Nature, and just being outdoors, is the best remedy.

The natural environment that provides stillness, silence and beauty is worth more than mountains of vitamins and anti-depressants.

My favourite spot is in our back yard in Bolton. While we're in a subdivision, we back onto a small forest.

It's also a pretty quiet neighbourhood. Sitting in a chair facing the forest has become my go-to spot, my deep-breathing escape. There's not much to see, really, just a few trees, some stumps and a few critters.

It's the focus, the washing away of excess that's key.

Like the Dalai Lama said, it's simplicity that matters.

And, my friends, Nature is free and available to everyone. It may not be outside your back door, but it's not far away. A local park, a drive down a country road, even a small babbling brook.

My two daughters drove up to Collingwood recently, just to find a nice spot to watch the sunset.

I truly believe humans are more connected to Mother Earth than we think. We share elements, water, oxygen. Heck, we even share DNA. We inhabit the same space. All life on Earth emerged, grew, evolved and beat the odds, together. We are forever linked.

Some suggest a few rather easy ways to stop and smell the roses.

We could try to set some limits, so we're not overburdened. We can try to slow down a bit. Some of us tend to make mountains out of molehills, and this needs to stop. It adds unnecessary stress to our lives. Many suggest relaxation techniques and meditation to help cleanse the soul and lift the spirit. Prayer never hurt.

All of this helps reduce our inner mind chatter. We're in our own heads 24/7 and it's so nice to get out once in a while.

Some refer to this as our natural state, where we simply be without comment, without debate, without any second guesses. Children know how to do this very well they are lost in every moment and are totally absorbed in playful activities.

Why have adults abandoned this amazing skill as we grew up?

I constantly have a need to play with miniature space ships, airplanes and the like. I buy them, repaint them and stage mock battles, sometimes in full view of my family in the living room. They see my behaviour as child-like and immature.

Bingo!

Isn't that the point of the exercise? Isn't that what the Dalai Lama is telling us?

A few of these priceless collectibles litter my desk at work and they make me smile.

For a few minutes, perhaps hours each week, I'm totally lost. I'm in outer space, above the clouds, in another time and place.

Experts say we should seek out areas of comfort and serenity. Religious facilities like church grounds, monasteries and temples are not just for religious ceremonies or occasions.

I have visited a few amazing spots in our area that ooze spiritual comfort and joy. Marylake Monastery in King, and the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism in Mono. Contact them to see if you can drop by and just stroll around. Your mind with thank you!

Inner peace will feed you, I am told. Mike Ditka said that success is measured by inner peace.

We are all on this journey of inner discovery together. While our innards may be different, we are part of the same human race.

Perhaps our race needs to slow down, and we should take off our racing gear.

There's no need to rush and make it to the finish line ahead of everyone else. We will all eventually get there.

I prefer to take the scenic route, through fields, over hills, across bridges.

Life could be as simple as that, if we allow it.

The last one to their special spot in complete silence is a rotten egg!