

Seek happiness from within

by Mark Pavilons

Each generation has its unique challenges and crosses to bear.

We Baby Boomers have evolved through some remarkable times, from the radical '60s and laid-back '70s to the tension-filled 2000s and current state of weirdness.

We've seen a lot over the years. Heck in my lifetime, we went from the moon to Mars; from stove-top popcorn to microwaves; rotary dial phones to smart phones.

In the theatres, I've seen everything from Jaws to Saws.

I witnessed the Blue Jays winning back-to-back World Series and this is something that may never be repeated in my lifetime. I'm still waiting for the Leafs to follow suit!

We all have a purpose in life, and while it's different for each and every one of us, one thing remains constant - the search for happiness.

When I was young, decisions were simple - matching my adidas Americana running shoes with my straight legs or bell bottoms (yes I said bell bottoms).

I remember when beer switched from stubbies to long necks; roll-up car windows became glorious power units. I remember LED and LCD watches, thinking they were the coolest things on the planet.

Were we happy? By and large, yes. I think when times are simple and stress levels are low, happiness, or at least contentment, comes a bit easier.

I had very few worries until I graduated college and began working full time in my career.

The progression of one's life was still a bit predictable - you fell in love, got married and had kids.

My wife Kim and I found joy and excitement over the years, on sandy beaches, boat cruises and hotel casinos.

At some point, you grow up, lines blur and you work to live. Responsibilities grow tenfold and when you're raising offspring, reality sinks in.

The road trips, drive-ins and poker nights are all things of the past, an era long forgotten and no longer in vogue.

We trudge through a few decades and end up in our late 40s or mid-50s with mortgage payments, hydro bills, RRSPs and paying for our children's post-secondary studies.

I've gained more than a few pounds and with a touch of gray, I am resembling my late father more and more each day. I'm starting to get cranky and have become a little more skeptical and less tolerant. But I continue to laugh.

I wonder how we let the world get to this point, where marijuana is legal; electric cars are replacing gas-powered vehicles; we can buy beer in grocery stores, and I can shop online for everything from wills to pills.

Has happiness suffered along the way?

Some deep thinkers view happiness as a lack of unhappiness, which comes down to our reaction to reality versus our very subjective expectations. In today's world, many things are beyond our control. All we can do is modify our expectations, by altering our wants and desires.

My wife introduced me to a saying that if you begin to expect less, you'll be pleasantly surprised more often. Lower the bar, I say! I think part of happiness lies deep inside. I began to understand and feel some peaceful contentment when I took a look at myself. I also felt an unbelievable calm during some recent Reiki sessions, courtesy of King's own Sue DelPlavignano. It has opened up a whole new realm of physical and spiritual serenity.

According to Buddha, "peace comes from within ... Do not seek it without."

In some religions like Buddhism, eliminating desire, wealth and material possessions seems to be the way to go. I think most of us know that material things are not the be all and end all. However, few of us will give up desire, wants or needs in place of enlightenment.

As rational human beings, one of our faults is setting goals with strict pathways and timelines. As most of us know, life is filled with dead-ends, u-turns and sink holes. I think we have to be more flexible with ourselves and our goals/results. Despite our intelligence we can inflict a lot of damage on ourselves.

Experts will tell you the biggest obstacle to our own happiness is our lack of self-compassion. We have rid ourselves of our own barriers to happiness.

I've found myself a bit jealous of those who achieved a certain level of fame and fortune. Most of us would agree that making more money would make our lives easier and much more enjoyable. Financial pressures, I find, have never been as tough as they are

today.

Whether the wealthy are happy or content is another matter. Money may make living easier, but it doesn't make life easier. There are lots of things I'd like to have, and I'm a bit of an obsessive eBay visitor. But I'm more of a window shopper than actual buyer, because reality and practicality always sets in. I've had my eye on this 3,000-year-old dagger from an archaeologist that's listed at just over \$400. I showed it to my family members, saying it would be a nice birthday present. But how can I justify spending \$400 on a display item when my oldest is in university and my other two are entering another school year? Do I deserve it? You bet! Do I need it? No. Will it make me happy? A little.

Humans tend to fixate on things they desire, and I'm guilty as charged.

I make no excuses for my hobby of collecting inexpensive ancient and medieval bronze crosses. These tiny trinkets, some as cheap as \$20, hold literally centuries of faith. Since our society is becoming more secular, such objects grow in meaning, to me at least. At this stage of my life, I am looking at the meaning of it all, in my own way.

Some people argue that you often find what you're looking for, when you stop looking.

The Dalai Lama advised that: If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. Enough said.