

Splurging means getting ?fries with that?

by MARK PAVILONS

With a few ?extra? bucks in my pocket, I decided to splurge, run some errands and get the family some take-out one recent Friday afternoon.

?Splurge??

My first stop was the LCBO for some overdue ?tonic.? My poison of choice went up \$2 since I last purchased it.

Next stop, grabbing a couple of long ?underwater? sandwiches. My pocket became \$22 lighter.

Then, driving through a lane to a take-out window, two burger meals dinged me for \$27.10.

A quick stop at a grocery store was the only bright light, as I grabbed two large packs of ground beef for \$11.45 each! But my joy was short-lived.

I?saw the price at the pumps and just kept driving.

At home, I?read that oil companies' profits doubled and tripled this year. What?

I felt like hitting myself in the face with a brick or small garden shovel, but of course I didn't have either of those items handy. I could have cried, but what would that accomplish?

So, my happy-go-lucky trip around town sent me into a bit of a spiral. Here I was, feeling good, trying to do something nice for the fam, and it was like getting knee-capped for all my troubles.

How do people do it, I asked myself again and again.

I am well aware of the ?cost of living,? and how most consumer goods have skyrocketed in recent months. But come on!

If the average family is spending \$100 more a month on groceries, and \$100 more a month on gas, who do they make up for this revenue shortfall?

Boomers are often heard talking about simpler times, and the cool 1970s and 1980s. ?Remembering when? sounds like a cliché.

As simple as it was, none of us wants to be 18 again today.

But if I encountered a time portal in my drive home, I would not have hesitated in taking it.

If an alien spaceship landed in a park near my house, I'd gladly hitch a ride to the great unknown.

Stop the world, I want to get off!

Our homes are typically are refuge, and provide solace from the harsh weather and realities outside. But, if our doors have gaps and our heating and air units are less than efficient, I?can see those \$5 bills slipping through the cracks, floating away, just like an old TV commercial.

A visit from a roofer revealed another harsh reality. Shingles, it appears, don't last anywhere near the 25-year rating. More like 15. And in the past decade, prices have risen substantially.

And no, it's not covered by the government's energy efficiency rebate and you won't benefit from your home insurance coverage for shingle loss.

As Canada becomes home to more and more refugees from around the globe, these newcomers will quickly learn just how expensive life is here in the Great White North.

They will suffer severe "sticker shock" when they go to the grocery store and see that butter is \$7 per pound and a decent t-bone rings in at \$25. Heck, they may even be bowled over paying \$3 for a cup of coffee.

They will look at typical two-storey, 5-bedroom homes in local subdivisions and wonder why we need all this space. Why indeed.

In most other countries, yes even the rich ones, large subdivision homes are rare. You won't find any "mansions" in the cities and small villages in England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Central and South America, Africa, etc.

My oldest daughter, who has visited Kenya and Rwanda, keeps in touch with people she met. When she showed them photos of our modest subdivision home in Bolton, they thought it was a small hotel. They asked just how many people live there. Just five.

When I was younger "boy it seems a lifetime ago" owning a million-dollar home was out of the question. We never believed prices would rise to current levels.

Our former family home "a walk-out bungalow on four acres in Caledon" was a paradise in many ways. It was my parents' dream and a place they thoroughly enjoyed. Getting it back one day is just a pipe dream.

When was the last time you felt really "at home"? Which of your homes was your favourite?

My two older kids were fond of our first home, an end-unit townhouse. It was warm and cozy and they have many early memories there.

But like Seuss's Once-ler, we "biggered our roads and biggered our wagons."

When you drive around typical subdivisions in Bolton, you'll see cars parked sideways on driveways just to squeeze them in.

And yet our fellow citizens around the globe don't own three or four gas-guzzling automobiles, jet skis, ride-on mowers or grass trimmers. Many don't even have shoes.

I recently got a letter from Peel Region, saying it's a good idea to get insurance on the water and sewage pipes coming from our house. It's the owners' responsibility, not the municipality's, so if something goes wrong, we're on the hook for repairs.

Great. But the full insurance only costs me only \$10.59 per month!

I think one of the reasons we average citizens are feeling hemmed in is due to our lack of regular contact with our friends and neighbours. We're not all in the same boat, but we're weathering the same storm.

I say let's bring back street parties, neighbourhood potlucks, even good, old-fashioned barn-raising. Let's dust off the shoes and get dancing.

Let's visit the neighbours who may be confined and bring some joy into their lives. Let's tend to the sick.

Let's force the storm clouds away and soak up the sun!