

The dash that represents our lives

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When you read an obituary, it often mentions the person's birth year and year of their death, separate by a small, seemingly insignificant dash.

But this dash represents their life and all that it entailed. Not insignificant at all, but rather THE most significant of all.

This analogy was used during recent Volunteer Week celebrations, referring to the amazing contributions of our volunteers.

This dash is filled with an almost unbelievable breadth of volunteer work, contributions to dozens of organizations, and untold hours given to the community. For our valiant volunteers, this dash is almost too big to be put into words or listed on a scroll.

The hours spent giving, building, creating and contributing may seem trivial at the time, but it's a domino effect, creating a tidal wave of goodwill.

Each volunteer hour is like a stitch in a giant community quilt, that constantly grows in colour, depth and richness.

There are two great days in a person's life - the day we are born and the day we discover why. - William Barclay

So what, then, do we accomplish during this dash of ours?

We are reminded to enjoy each and every minute, for life is short. I think we also have to infuse our lives with action, whether it's steps in our long journey, hanging a left from time to time, and undertaking meaningful acts. Big or small, they all add up, like grains of sand that come together to form a beautiful, expansive beach.

This moment, this dash, is our life.

Some choose to live life creatively. There's no shortage of talent among our fellow men, women and children. From pre-teen singers and dancers, to writers, photographers, artists and sculptors, self-expression is an amazing gift. It's one big stage play; a never-ending song, an action-packed adventure.

Life is filled with beauty. We tend to rush around, bent on making it from point A to point B with speed and sometimes haste.

If you get a chance, feed the fish, I say. Stop, take a look around and notice the tiny things that make this life so wonderful.

During a pleasant day recently, I opened the car window, felt the sun on my cheek and a gentle breeze blowing through my hair. I closed my eyes and soaked it all in. A classic 1969 Firebird rumbled past and I caught the smell of exhaust. Glorious!

Some inject their lives with humour and copious amounts of smiles and hugs. Our fellow creatures, whether on two legs or four, give us plenty of reasons to laugh.

Life is simple, Confucius said, but we have a habit of making it complicated.

In recent years, perhaps bolstered by certain meds, I approach each day, each assignment, each task, with a sense of practicality and calm. I've spent too many years stressed out and worried so I've learned to be pragmatic. I look at each day's list of chores, work-related tasks and those mundane must-dos with a sense of purpose and forethought. It must be done, so do it with pride or some sort of gusto.

We can't avoid them. Those horrible undertakings will soon be over, and we can look back and say to ourselves, well that wasn't so

bad.?

I've found that's almost always the case. It is never as bad as anticipated. Fears are often paper tigers.

Jackie Robinson once said that a life is not important, except in the impact it has on other lives.

My belief is that we live our lives the best we can with what we have. If we make an effort and get average marks, we've passed! If we manage to touch some lives, hearts and souls along the way, it's a bonus. Our legacy, in the end, is our interactions with our fellow human beings, and impressions we leave. We don't have to go down in history as great artists, architects or medical researchers. If we leave behind a trail of love, compassion, grace, humility and a laugh or two, I think we've done well.

It's easy to be pessimistic, so the key is to find ways to be optimistic.

When I looked at some of the faces of the volunteers who were recognized, I saw joy, peace, serenity and humility. They do what they do because they love it, and they've discovered there's great strength from giving.

We all have to brush off the dust from our shoulders every once in a while. We have to endure pain and suffering, too.

Our Creator had enough confidence in us to not only build a perfect creature, but arm us with everything we need to survive and strive.

If He has faith in us, we should, too.

As we struggle from time to time, we should never forget just how lucky we are to be here in the first place. Miraculous! We beat the odds and our family trees flourished when others withered and died. We made it! Now what?

Well, if you're a Baby Boomer like me, just think about all the things we've seen and done in our lives. I witnessed the birth of the Internet and first cell phones. I've seen images from deep space, thanks to the Hubble telescope. I can have a conversation with someone without picking up a phone! I can order an article of clothing and it will be on my doorstep in 24 hours. I have children! I actually like wasabi! I climbed a pyramid at Chichen Itza and have seen several Caribbean sunsets. I've won and lost at the slots. I have loved and won!

While these may not seem like herculean accomplishments, they're just fine by me.

Hopefully, when my time is up, they will have tombstones with video screens. That way, I can leave a rather nifty and lengthy message for all who pass, and press the button.

Let's all endeavor to make that dash of ours as robust and colourful as possible!