

The fatigue of one small town storyteller

by Mark Pavilons

I drive down the rural road, through the sleet, looking into the distance. It's dark earlier now after the time change and it feels much later than it is.

The hits from the '70s and '80s on the radio don't offer much in the way of comfort.

Like the valiant firefighters in our midst, I'm constantly looking for smoke and their respective fires.

From one to another I go, with hose in hand, dousing the flames. One trauma, emergency, fashion disaster or lost temper after another. One frozen wiper blade and flat tire to tricky door locks and eye appointments. This is my life in a nutshell. Perhaps it's not unlike many others out there. Parents dash to and fro, wiping eyes, giving hugs, calming hot heads, correcting mistakes. And that's at the end of a typical day, which follows a full day at work, perhaps some errands and a part-time job. It may also include a trip to the mechanic to drop off one of the cars. Oh, and then there's dinner, cleaning up after dinner and getting a plumber over to fix the pipes under the kitchen sink. Another day, another series of minor skirmishes. I often don't know whether I've won or lost any of the battles.

When the fires are extinguished, I stare off beyond the pixels in the HD TV, trying to find a deeper meaning. This, too, offers little comfort.

As my better half begins to nod off, I line up my regrets, indiscretions and sins, and go through them all with a fine-tooth comb. Then, like a shooting gallery at a small-town fair, I knock them over in quick succession, patting myself on the back for this accomplishment. But there's no stuffed animal.

After listening to late night talk show hosts berate politicians, I drag my sorry butt up the stairs and hit the hay, trying to avoid the body-sized divot I caused on my side of the 'dent-proof' mattress.

The lights remain on in the hall until daughter number one gets home from work after midnight.

Often, mom is still awake 'going to sleep is not an option until all offspring are counted for and safe. If some of our hummingbirds can't get to sleep, a conversation ensues, until the wee hours. Mom is happy to oblige.

Such is the burden of being a mom.

I 'have it easy, she believes, but I take my sins to bed. I 'need my beauty sleep to ward off the demons that threaten to keep me awake.

I 'miss out on the conversations in the living room below, but I often hear some shouting, high pitched squeals and laughter. I pass on such nuggets of personal information to my eldest, who's likely the most mature to listen and comprehend my predicament.

But you need to enjoy life more, get out and do things, she says. Life isn't one disaster after another, but a long lineup of joyful moments.

She's right.

Any adult who's managed to survive and thrive into their 50s knows full well the so-called meaning of life. We should know what's important and what things are worth worrying about and what's not. We should be aware of the fond memories, those special times

that can't be replaced. We must realize just how blessed we are. We shouldn't have to be beaten over the head with common sense. I'm not sure how or why I let those nagging gremlins get the best of me. I suppose I believe those fires need to be put out, and my role demands that I act. I must fix things.

My wife reminds me our kids don't want Mr. Fix-it, they want hugs, support, encouragement, optimism. They don't need frowns or grumpiness they have their own woes to contend with.

Our brains are fickle things and so are our memories.

I can't recall much from my youth, other than some spotty high school and college moments. I remember my 1970 Camaro, and still berate myself for letting it go. I remember pizza and beer with friends at a family restaurant in the old part of Brampton. I've never mourned much over the years, even though everyone in my birth family has gone. There are times, however, when I do feel like something important is missing, like something has been stripped away. I remember my mom, dad and sister, but their faces are a bit fuzzy now and few moments stand out in my mind.

They were part of me once, but are they still?

I play with toys and watch sci-fi to take my mind off this planet's current predicament. I need a distraction, something to calm the turbulent whirlpools in my soul.

I also need some ointment to rub on my shoulder, to ease a nagging new pain. I've depleted our supply of Aleve thanks to pain from my trigger finger and cracked molar.

I have to keep an eye on my daughter's OSAP, my son's college fees and my youngest daughter's grades.

I have to cook, clean and make sure the dogs don't run out of food.

I have to worry that the next wind storm will pry loose even more shingles.

I am really looking forward to some R&R over the upcoming holidays. I just want to decompress, flop on the couch and maybe even get hooked on the latest Netflix series.

I want to hear the ice cubes bump around in my glass of Crown Royal.

I also want peace in the world, in the living room and in my mind. Time to reflect.

Time to draw the blinds and let the sunshine in!