

We can't relive the past, as much as we try

by MARK PAVILONS

Humans tell stories to one another on a daily basis.

Many of these are tidbits, anecdotes tales about recent or past events.

We reminisce over our best memories, vacations, family gatherings, relatives people and places, sights and sounds.

Our lives are made of bits and pieces of, well, everything.

But is reflection adequate, or sufficient, in relaying an event lost to time? We can't be there, back in that safe, warm place ever again. It also gets harder and harder to recall certain details as time goes on.

So why do we like to ponder and reflect so much? Why were the good, old days, so good?

Sure, it helps us understand the journey we've taken and how our lives have become woven together by these strands. Memories are timeless and we try to keep them close to our heart.

Many believe revisiting happy moments lifts us up and puts some umph back in our stride. Our experiences also carry some important lessons we've learned along the way.

Nostalgia, old school and those bygone days, are terms that abound in our modern language.

Some things are making a comeback, like muscle cars, rock and roll, even tie-dye and lava lamps. These things all remind us of personal moments in our past.

And yes, for those in their 50s and 60s, there was never a time like it.

We tend to be pensive when facing stress or some emotional turmoil. There's no shortage of either these days, I'm afraid.

Experts say our lonely selves long to be connected to our previous, happier selves.

I had thought that our computer-like brains record everything in our lives, with perfect precision. Apparently, that's not accurate. While our brains are massive tape recorders, they interpret our own reality based on our biology and emotion. The 86 billion neurons in our brain outnumber the stars in the Milky Way. Each one forms thousands of connections, storing information and memories.

Our hippocampus acts like a librarian, organizing old memories and filing new ones. When we think back, the librarian goes to the shelf, removes the book and retells the story. But it's a reconstruction not an exact snapshot collection of sights and sounds mashed together.

Apparently our emotions act like glue when it comes to memory sealing some, peeling off others and, in some cases, not sticking at all. It all depends how impactful those feelings were.

Gray matter aside, our memories are unique to us and make us who we are. They bolster our sense of identity.

Here's a tough question for us all. Ask someone to describe themselves or answer the question: who are you?

You're going to find it a difficult task. I tried, but couldn't come up with anything that really defined who I am. Give it a try, I dare you!

When we refer to ourselves, we often glance back, citing things from our past. Our parents, their morals, and our environments growing up all shaped who we are.

Maybe we can't totally separate what was, from what is.

All I could come up in this exercise was describing myself physically, my likes, hobbies and upbringing. But these do not define me, they help shape me.

Maybe it's impossible for us to fully describe ourselves, in an intense, honest, deep resume-like way.

I like dogs, chicken wings, sci-fi and philosophy. My life is average. I came into the world cold and afraid, and I will leave pretty much the same.

I never designed an art museum, nor will there be a statue of me in the town square (but I wouldn't be opposed to the idea). It's unlikely I will have a street or park named after me.

And when I am plucked out of this existence, memories will live on in those who knew me.

Merriam-Webster defines nostalgia as "a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition."

Irrecoverable? That's sad. Just why do we yearn for chasing our memories?

I think it's like your favourite throw blanket or comfy chair. It's a feeling of safety, an almost child-like innocence.

Have you visited the neighbourhood where you grew up? Do you still connect with childhood friends?

I don't really have a desire to revisit our first home on Edilou Drive in Etobicoke. But my parents built our family home on Duffy's Lane, just north of Bolton. It was there, on that four-acre, L-shape property backing on to the Bolton Golf Club, that I connect with.

I was one with nature. I had chores but I explored, unfettered by hard and fast rules, bicycle helmets or curfews. I found snakes, frogs and minnows.

Oh, how I would love to return. Sure, you can physically return, but mentally is another matter.

My wife Kim and I lived in two apartments and two homes. All were memorable, but our kids all comment about how much they liked the townhouse, even though it was much too small for a family of five. But that's where their childhood memories flourished and laughter permeated the walls.

"Wherever you go, your memories from the place you grew up in always remain special," said Guru Randhawa.

Lee Radziwill once said without memories, there is no life.

I suppose we all remember our firsts - first date, first car, first A on our report cards.

So, my friends, if all of our flashbacks bring back positive memories, just what are we doing wrong today? Why aren't we making

happier memories each and every day, from now on?

Has life become too complicated, stressful, costly, and hard that it has drained memory-making from our brains?

In the end, as our memories fade, can we ever return home?

Let's vow to take all those puzzle pieces from our past, and attach them to new ones from our present.

This is our masterpiece.