

Yesterdayland, Todayland, and Tomorrowland

by BROCK WEIR

It's often said that hindsight is 20/20, but sometimes the results can be unexpected.

Having kids of one's own, I hear, can give you a new appreciation of what your parents went through with you, particularly if your kids try to pull the same stunts.

It does, of course, cut both ways.

Hindsight can also help you scratch the surface of positive or negative memories, giving you new context through which you can re-evaluate them either way.

In other, less drastic ways, these experiences can reinforce the fact that you're living in the here and now and some of these life lessons you've taken with you from childhood no longer have any relevance or currency in today's world. Advice from parents and grandparents on homeownership to kids born in the 80s, 90s, and early 00s immediately comes to mind, but that's a subject for another column!

Who else grew up in the 1990s grew up watching Mrs. Doubtfire?

Chances are, when you first saw it as a youngster, you sided with Robin Williams' Daniel when his marriage blew up following a raucous indoor party, complete with a petting zoo in the living room featuring livestock. As fun a party as it looked, in hindsight, Sally Field's Miranda had every right to shut that nonsense down.

Who was going to clean that up, let alone re-plant her begonias?

In an informal straw poll of my peers, the general consensus was the invariable change of allegiance came as something of a surprise. Of course, it's less of a surprise to our parents as they watched it with us and they knew where they stood. They knew what the future would hold.

But what does the future hold for all of us?

Maybe in this case it's important to look back before we look forward.

Throughout our history, anyone with a splash of creativity coursing through their veins has had one vision or another of what the next decades, centuries or millennia might look like.

In the 1950s, when humans began to make real strides towards viable space travel, this spit-balling on what's to come hit something of a fever pitch, with even Walt Disney embedding these very ideas into his theme parks through the development of Tomorrowland.

Walt Disney, storyteller, visionary, and one of Time's 20 most influential innovators of the 20th century, saw the future as a wondrous and magical place, said Rachel Withers in a 2017 Slate article entitled, Yesterdayland. He embraced new technology throughout his career: His early animations used what were then cutting-edge effects, such as color and sound, and he was obsessed with mass transit, with the concept for Disneyland coming out of his passion for increasingly large model trains. Plus, he loved outer space. From 1954 to 1958, he hosted Disneyland, a weekly show on ABC, to finance the park's construction. His passion for futurology came across in his Tomorrowland segments. Tomorrowland, referred to in early plans as The Land of Tomorrow, and envisioned by Walt to be 'the factual and scientific exposition of things to come,' was one of four imaginative realms that park-goers could visit (Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland, and Tomorrowland). Walt always intended his park to be educational as well

as entertaining. In his Tomorrowland dedication speech, displayed in the park to this day, Walt promised the land would be a vista into a world of wondrous ideas, signifying man's achievements? a step into the future, with predictions of constructive things to come. Tomorrow offers new frontiers in science, adventure and ideals: the Atomic Age? the challenges of outer space? and the hope for a peaceful and unified world. But the problem with designing the world of tomorrow soon became apparent: Tomorrow very quickly becomes today, and then yesterday. The future never stays that way for long.?

We're now living in the timeline that Disney envisioned in the future, but I doubt many of us are feeling it is necessarily a time of wondrous ideas and constructive things to come. There have been innovative ideas, sure, but constructive? I guess it depends on your perspective.

New frontiers in science, adventure and ideals? Sure, but some of these new frontiers in science have been conquered out of necessity more than anything else; and many the conquest of new, adventurous ?frontiers? often feels more driven by profit than knowledge and knowledge-sharing.

Part and parcel of this vision of the future espoused by our forebears focused on robotics and primitive ideas of what we now call A.I. set on making our lives easier and more fulfilling, but as both have progressed rapidly in the last decade or so, has it been for the greater good?

Various forms of Artificial Intelligence have the potential to make a powerful, positive impact on this world, and have already proven themselves, but the march of this particular form of ?progress? has also made many occupations endangered and, some of those individuals holding purse-strings might wrongly argue, obsolete.

Robots were also supposed to be developed for the betterment of our lives and society. Who wouldn't want a delightfully sassy robot like Rosie from The Jetsons powering up every morning to help us get through the drudgery with a healthy helping of snark delivered on the side just for kicks?

I know I did.

Now, at a local big box store, I see a robot, with its outer features arranged in such a way to suggest a friendly smile, roaming about cleaning floors while, at any given moment, in a quiet corner of their parking lot, are two packed-to-the-roof cars that appear to be serving as their driver's primary residence. It might not be glamorous, but perhaps an opportunity for a custodial job could make a world of difference in their lives.

At any number of fast-food outlets, we have machines there ready to take our order, with varying degrees of success; at some of our ?slow food? establishments, we now have to contend with our orders being delivered by a happy l'il robot who has taken the place of a human; at some of our largest service providers, if we want customer service, we have to get through the gate-keeper of cutesy chatbots that are ill-equipped to handle many of the simplest request. And then, of course, we have the self-check-outs at the grocery stores and new machines in some locations that are, apparently, there to check your work before letting you out of the store.

And on and on it goes, along with our chance for human interaction, opportunity and, when you get right down to it, humanity.

Which brings me back to the life lessons provided by the likes of Daniel and Miranda Hillard in Mrs. Doubtfire.

As much as we loved to hate the stuffy and gruff Mr. Spacely, at least he had the sense to recognize George Jetson's specialized skills in producing Spacely Sprockets and held off on replacing him with a clanking riveter known as Rosie 2.0.