

Past, present and future are all connected

Mark Pavilons

If you have to look back, keep one foot on the gas!

What I mean by that is remembering your past is important, but keep moving forward. There's a lot still left to do in this life of ours.

Bob Marley once sang:

?If you know your history

Then you would know where you coming from

Then you wouldn't have to ask me

Who the heck do I think I am?



Yes, our lineage is really important, not to mention very cool. How cool? Well, for any of us to be here today, our lineage would have to be unbroken, and continuous, back to the very beginning! Yes, our ancestors survived the ice age, predators, disease, plagues and wars, to survive, have families, and produce children. We have to thank our very existence to them and their survival.

I don't think about my deceased family members very much. I lost my dad, sister, mother and closest uncle in a span of 12 years. My dad never got to see my children and my sister died before our youngest daughter Kyleigh was born. My mom lived with us before she passed, and managed to see my kids grow and blossom.

There are times when I feel a little lost. I'm almost an orphan and no longer have any direct ties to my heritage. I never knew my grandparents from either side.

My parents grew up during the Second World War, the last most destructive global conflict that ended entire family trees. How they survived is remarkable.

My mom was of Polish and German descent. A little ironic, since the Germans invaded Poland to launch the war, on my mom's 10th birthday. Her mom died during the war of appendicitis ? she simply could not make it to the hospital on time.

My mom and uncle were very close. My uncle was mischievous, but that likely aided in their survival. After the war, they were trapped in Russian-occupied East Germany and had to scavenge for food and other necessities. One story they told me was when my uncle boarded a Russian supply train, carrying food to the occupying forces. He located several bags of potatoes and began kicking them off the train to my mother, who waited below, collecting the spuds. They caught the attention of Russian soldiers, who opened fire with machine guns. As the bullets whizzed by, they gathered as many potatoes as they could and ran off, into the woods. The Russians not have hesitated in killing them if they were caught.

They were both young teens at the time and I couldn't imagine this happening to me, or my kids. For them, it was survival. It was the spoils of war. There were other instances, where my mom and uncle were injured and assaulted, but they escaped with their lives.

My dad was Latvian and the Baltic countries suffered at the hands of both the Russians and the Germans during the war. He was around 18 during the war, and was forced to serve in the Latvian militia. He relayed a couple of anecdotes about skirmishes and close calls. His final injury came when he was on a troop train that was strafed by an enemy fighter plane. The window next to him shattered and the glass caught him in the forearm, leaving him with a life-long scar. He didn't talk a lot about the war, likely because he saw things that no 18-year-old should ever experience.

Again, the fact he survived is amazing. And the fact these two people, from different countries, were brought together for a new life

in Canada after the war, is beyond lucky. Coincidence? Divine intervention? Fate?

From tragic beginnings came a whole new existence in this land of plenty. They worked hard and managed to eek out a decent living in this country, raising my sister and I. We didn't have a lot, but wanted to nothing. We ate as a family, loved, talked and shared stories.

I always wanted to learn more about my ancestry, but my efforts have been in vain. My parents didn't know much about their ?greats? and a lot of family records were destroyed during the war, hindering my research.

So I have been unable to uncover mysteries of the Pavilons, Fietkau and Pachutski clans.

I visited Germany when I was 11 but I was too young to ?get it.? I never visited any memorials, castles or villages where my mom lived. They moved often, and were bombed out of a few cities.

My dad visited Latvia once, shortly after the wall came down and the communist-grip loosened on his homeland. He was disappointed that Latvia was stifled under communism and I'm sure his visit was more melancholy than uplifting.

Today, our family gatherings consist of my wife's family and extended family. More colourful roots to be sure.

Our children are lucky to have grandparents on my wife's side. They love listening to stories about papa's and nana's teen years, before they moved to Canada.

I have thought about exploring my roots through online websites. If you go back far enough, not only are we all related, but our very distant beginnings all lead us to Africa or Middle Easter nations ??the birthplaces of modern human beings.

Would my life be fuller if I knew about life in rural Latvia, Poland or Germany in the 1600s? Would I be more complete if I learned that my ancestors were medieval knights or took part in the Crusades? I don't know.

What I do know is that we should respect, understand and pay homage to our past, and our ancestors, who struggled, fought and lived. They likely never thought about future generations, or that one of their heirs would be writing about them in 2018. They probably just worked hard to ensure they had food on the table and a roof over their heads.

When I raise a glass of imported beer, I toast to my dad, mom and uncle. I also say thanks to the generations of my forefathers and mothers who paved the way for my life today. To them, I am forever grateful.

When we look back, and ahead, at the same time, we are providing a link, a continuation of our species.

Keep a foot on the gas, my friends, but look in the rearview from time to time!