

Our lives are filled with many ?close calls?

MARK PAVILONS

?Near-death experiences give you balance. You become more worldly.?Your ideas become bigger.? **Jason Calacanis**

The Good Lord was looking out for me last week.

On my way to the office last Tuesday morning, another driver made an erratic left turn right in front of me. He came out of nowhere and I?had to summon my instincts to make a hard left, swerving around him and avoiding all other vehicles in the vicinity.

I?firmly believed, in those brief seconds, that a collision was imminent and it could have been the end for yours truly.

I?continued on and made it to the parking lot safely. I?thanked the Good Lord and continued on with my day.

It was production day for the newspaper after all and I?had a lot of work to do by deadline. My readers were counting on me!

An accident, aside from serious harm and injury, would have been a total pain. My car would have been written off and the insurance wouldn't give me a nickel for my 2002 Buick Century Custom. It would be scrapped and I would have to scurry to find a replacement. Since we're making monthly payments on our new Maytag, there's no wiggle room for a car. My son desperately wants a car of his own, so I would have to borrow his in this worst-case scenario. I don't think many dads imagine saying ?hey son, can I borrow the car keys??

Here's the catch-22, the ultimate joke. I can't die just yet because my life isn't worth anything! You see, my life insurance policy reached its 10-year anniversary, and a renewal premium for anyone over 50 is a bit steep, more than double our previous premiums. Up until March 2, I was worth half a million, and that would have helped take care of my family.

Now, my death would actually be a huge financial burden. My wife would have to sell the house, pay off the debts and find a small house for herself and the kids.

Whenever I hear about tragic accidents on our roads and highways, I?think about how sad it is to die needlessly. I can't process it when someone is killed on the way to work! Our country has witnessed horrible collisions that have taken many lives.

Most motorists, who've been driving in this province for more than a couple of decades, have had a few close calls. I've been fortunate to have escaped any major incidents or collisions. I?slid into someone last winter during a storm in London, Ont., but at 15 km/h it was almost a ?non-collision??given the result. My parents had a couple of run-ins with deer over the years in rural Caledon and my mom was rear-ended after picking me up from a grade school concert in Palgrave.

I?have noticed, however, in recent years, that one must be on their toes while driving. There are a gazillion vehicles on the roads today and unfortunately not everyone is well trained or proficient at driving. You have to constantly be on your guard for other drivers and always be aware of your surroundings.

We are also shopping around for car insurance and this is not how I want to spend my free time!

Some firmly believe that we all have a guardian angel, and perhaps even enjoy divine intervention or just plain luck from time to time.

Howard Schultz once said that life ?is a series of near misses.?

I?will never forget a story my mom told me of their post-war experiences.

My mom and uncle were young teens during the Russian occupation of Germany after the war. All supply lines were strictly controlled and locals were fighting for survival. My uncle, being brave or likely foolish, decided to hop onto a slow-moving supply train where he found a mountain of sacks of potatoes. He began kicking them off the train, to my mom who was waiting near the tracks. This, of course, caught the attention of the Russian soldiers, who began shooting at my uncle with machine guns. Bullets whizzed by his ears but he escaped unscathed.

This curious brother and sister duo often found weapons and live hand grenades in the forests near their home. Many were abandoned by German soldiers. Even possessing an accessory from a German soldier would have also gotten them killed. It's a wonder they didn't blow themselves up.

My dad, being a young man in Latvia during the war, also had a few ?close calls.?He witnessed some friends getting killed and he was hit by a bullet while riding a train, when it was attacked by a strafing fighter plane.

In my youth, I?played with toy planes, tanks and guns, not fully grasping the gravity of it all.

When you're young, you fall, tumble, roll, bounce, twist and turn. Children encounter many near misses but seldom think twice about them.

I was hit by a car on my street when I was about nine. Again, he came to a screeching halt as I ran across the road, and I do recall hitting the pavement with my head. All is well, or so I was told. That could explain my quirky sense of humour or an involuntary twitch every time I smell asphalt!

We all know our time here is limited and humans are fully aware of our mortality. All of us will experience the death of a loved one. I have already lost everyone in my birth family - my sister and both parents.

Those of us who feel part of something bigger, may look forward to meeting them again one day.

Regardless of our beliefs, our aches, pains and high blood pressure are constant reminders of our inherent frailties. Yes, modern medicine will continue to improve and increase lifespans. My children may very well live beyond 120.

The prospect of death used to scare the heck out of me. I would lay awake, trying to imagine 'nothingness' and the blackness of non-existence. Unfathomable.

I suppose with age comes the acceptance of death. I don't want to leave prematurely. But when my number is up, I hope the white light turns into a glimmer of eternal joy. Heck, I wouldn't object to returning as a dog in my next life.

Here's to not knowing! And, as Red Green used to say, 'keep your stick on the ice.'

