

We are unique, but are we irreplaceable?

MARK PAVILONS

Who am I and what do I mean to you? This was the opening line of a piece of high school prose I wrote several decades ago. It still has meaning today. It's a sort of self-reckoning, and self-evaluation of one's worth or place in the cogs of the massive wheel of life. Am I an acquaintance, colleague, peer, friend, perhaps even a means to an end? Am I merely a widget, a small piece of that massive, all sky puzzle that's laid out on the living room floor? Am I a colleague, a professional you rely upon for the news of the day, one who has the pulse of the community; a 'tool' who writes, reports, and evokes thought? Perhaps it's a bit philosophical, and maybe a bit too deep. Are we defined by our jobs, careers and perceived roles? Aren't we much, much more? I am all those things, but I am a husband, father and friend. I rely on my unique experiences and life journey to portray a small, but vibrant portion of that 'big picture'—we're all part of. I am a person, a member of the community, a taxpayer with a voice and an opinion. I am a consumer, a homeowner, a motorist, a knowledge-seeker who thinks about humankind's origins, and our lengthy and varied history. I care. I care about my fellow humans because, when it comes down to it, they are my brothers and sisters. They are my extended family and we all have many things in common, not the least of which is our fear of death and the unknown. People smile when they see me in my colourful shirts during the summer months. They notice that I'm often smiling, evoking those deep creases in my careworn face. I sometimes turn heads with my unintentional deep, booming voice. I am unique, as are we all. I realize there are more than seven billion souls on this planet, but I think it's sad to lose just one. Each has the potential to contribute, enlighten and bring joy to another human being. My oldest daughter has travelled the world on humanitarian missions and she will tell you each smile, each encounter is priceless. It never gets old, whether she's teaching an English class in Rwanda or discussing the future with a food truck operator in Guatemala. She considers every one of these seemingly unimportant encounters as remarkable and memorable. Perhaps she's on to something. I'm well versed regarding her compassion, advocacy and hard work. I know she truly cares and has a huge heart. But she has something more. She is a keen observer and has a knack for bonding with others, making them feel comfortable. I think we all have this ability, but perhaps it remains dormant or is a bit weak for lack of use. I tend to be a good judge of character, and lately I'm less harsh in my opinions. I've learned there is always more than meets the eye, and people have a habit of surprising you. We are too quick to judge. When I interview people for newspaper articles, I look beyond the obvious. Sure, I ask them about their passions and their accomplishments, but I want to know more. I want to know what makes them tick, and why they get out of bed every morning with a spring in their step. I want to know how they view the world around them and whether they're one with nature or one with God. This is where humanity shines. One can argue that we, as individuals, don't have much of an impact on the big picture. The sad thing is, if any one of us suddenly succumbs to a heart attack or stroke, or dies in a car accident, few would ultimately be affected. For me, it's maybe a dozen or two souls. For, others, maybe it's a couple hundred. But really, our lives and a handful of accomplishments all come down to a few dozen weepy eyes, some photos captured on smart phones, and some old texts or emails. Of course, some of the evidence of our existence, and perhaps even some thoughts and insights, will float around the Internet for years to come. For those interested enough to care, they may come across some of my columns and say to themselves, 'just who was this Mark Pavilons?' Who, indeed? Recently, there have been many fatalities reported on the TV news—stabbings or shootings, some random, some not. All you see on the news are some police cruisers, yellow tape, and the strip mall or industrial plaza where the incident occurred. We don't know the victim and all we see is some crappy parking lot and a pizza joint or restaurant in the background. How sad is it to be remembered, for only a brief moment, as the guy who died in front of 'Pepperoni Planet.' Sorry for being a bit of a downer, so let me turn that frown upside down! I have learned as I age, even incrementally, that I no longer need to be in a rush. I move a bit slower and tend to pay attention to the world around me. There's a lot of beauty and wonder out there. I embrace the little things and tiny moments because if you think about it, life is made up of an endless string of such small pearls, making a huge, priceless strand. I tend to stare longer at the faces of my loved ones. I want to remember them always, even though they are constantly changing and maturing. Maybe we should all just stop, smell a couple of roses, and be kind to one another.

