

Will we all be gone without a trace?



MARK PAVILONS

One minute we're here, the next moment we're gone. Nothing, not a trace. It was as if we were never here. Other than trinkets, baubles, clothes and a mess in the bathroom, when we vanish from the face of the earth very little of ourselves remains. Hollow, material things, made by strangers, adorn our walls and shelves. Not very reassuring, not one bit. I am still struggling with the mortality of it all, and the finite existence we all have. Two people I knew passed away recently. One was only 39 and the other in his 80s. Loss sucks. I thought about the whole circle of life but fell deep into despair, into a dark, bleak spot in my head. It's like taking a huge, human family portrait and just cutting people out, one by one, as they pass. No more smiling faces, no more untucked shirts or crooked ties. No more anything. And that makes me sad beyond description. What will I do when I have to face the final curtain, when my time is up? I don't want to go. I never want to disappear into nothingness, let go and depart without a trace. That's horrible. Go, go where, exactly? If I knew, I may be somewhat comforted at the prospect. I like to be prepared, all packed, with my toothbrush, pills, a change of clothes and my wallet, just in case. If I am taken, with or without my consent, will I have to leave with the clothes on my back? Now, I have quite the collection of colourful Hawaiian shirts and any one of them would suit me fine. In the blinding whiteness of the great beyond, I'd be sure to stand out. Sure, at that point there is no one to impress, but I don't want to be lost, without direction and without purpose. I don't want to be all alone. Blend in, blend in with who, where, for what reason? I have never been one to melt away into the glob of human goo. Will Heaven be different? It won't matter what I'm wearing if the next plateau ??the next and perhaps final destination ??is but a black, empty void, a blanket of thick nothingness that wraps around my very soul and sucks every bit of essence from me. Then where would I be? I just left my home world, a place I had finally gotten used to after so many decades of challenges, hurdles, tears, joys and pain. And to leave it all behind, for what, an endless nightmare, a dream where I can't scream, can't move, can't get away? Not my cup of tea, as the Brits say. I like being a human being, with all of my faults, frailties, shortcomings, indiscretions, bad habits and bad moods. I like chicken wings, cold pizza and Crown Royal. I like the smell of campfires, the sound of waves reaching the shore. I like the feel of sunshine on my crumpled, scarred face. I like petting my dogs and hearing my kids laugh. I love seeing my wife smile. Will these things abound in the afterlife, like moving Harry Potter-like pictures on the wall of some immense castle in the sky? Not bloody likely. I don't want to share the Bates Motel of the next life with millions of strangers, all wandering around in their hospital gowns. I don't want to be anywhere that I can't feel, touch, smell, see or taste. I want to exist, and continue to thrive, in some form or another. I'd even be happy with being a spirit, a ghostly shadow of my former self, floating around the world. Oh, the places we'll go: There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won't want to go on, according to Dr. Seuss. When I watch apocalyptic movies about zombies and vampires, most of humans would rather die than live as monsters. Not me! Hell, if the only option is to roam about mindlessly in search of flesh, I'll take it. And I can keep on wearing my floral shirts for all eternity! Death, in my opinion, is overrated. It is not the ideal end to a life here on earth, a journey in the flesh. It's not a fitting end to anyone's story. Even Frankenstein's monster wanted to live. As we move forward and our species continues to evolve and progress, I wish science would create a way to save and preserve our essence, our soul if you will. If we can be ?downloaded? or ?copied? or even ?posted? on the internet, we would have a morsel of everlasting life. If my family doesn't want to keep me around in a holographic alarm clock so be it. Send me to another port or USB and bid me a bon voyage! Or, shoot my tattered remains, in cryogenic stasis, into deep space, to one day be revived by an advanced species who

are just dying to be regaled by my stories of wit and humour! I enjoy learning about Ancient Greek, Roman and Mayan civilizations. I have a fondness for antiquities and have a small collection of artifacts. Am I keeping the flame of gladiators and medicine men alive, and honouring their memory in some small way? Perhaps. But will future generations uncover and proudly display a button from one of my aforementioned shirts? Will someone, in transcribing earth's internet history, come across one of my columns and be inspired? Again, not bloody likely. We have a set of wind chimes in our back yard. They make the most beautiful sound in the summer. They clang together whenever there is a breeze. They're not aware of their actions because they're not alive. But they will continue to chime as long as there's wind. They have the potential to last forever. I know, too, that one day our sun will die, and our planet will be reduced to a frozen wasteland, void of life. None of us will be around of course, and neither will our great, great, great grandchildren. But it's still not fair. It's not how a race should meet its maker. So, if anyone has any comforting words about mortality, lay them on me! Time for a great big group hug and sigh, as we are all merely players on an immense stage. We don't know when our show will close, we but it must.