

Re-evaluating our existence

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?I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.?

? Douglas Adams, The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

Human beings constantly try to figure out this enigma known as existence.

We're all unique and strange. Some of us are these really big brains, walking around in awkward, fragile bodies, susceptible to breakdown from many sources. We may relax from time to time (some more than others), but our minds never stop working.

It's unknown just how much of our three-pound organ we use, but it's way more than the 10% reported years ago ? an urban legend with unknown origins.

According to the ?experts,??it turns out that we use virtually every part of the brain and most of it is active almost all the time. The brain represents three per cent of the body's weight and uses 20 per cent of the body's energy.

The average human brain weighs about three pounds and comprises the hefty cerebrum, which is the largest portion and performs all higher cognitive functions; the cerebellum, responsible for motor functions, such as the coordination of movement and balance; and the brain stem, dedicated to involuntary functions like breathing. The majority of the energy consumed by the brain powers the rapid firing of millions of neurons communicating with each other.

Evidence shows that over the course of a day, you use 100% of your brain.

And, despite our intellect, we have yet to unravel life's mysteries. Even after thousands of years, we can't adequately and completely explain love, fate, a higher power, the afterlife and whether there's intelligent life in the cosmos. We also have trouble opening a pack of deli meat.

What does this have to do with our daily lives, as we delve into 2014?

Well, this time of year often forces us to sit back, recollect, take stock and ponder all those twists and turns in our life's journey.

Did our lives turn out as we had hoped or believed?

As a young person, I?never really ?planned? or ?laid out? my future in any detail. I think most of us just hoped for our share of love, happiness, family and a meaningful existence.

I am reminded of the Rolling Stones verse that says you don't always get what you want, but most often you get what you need.

In today's world, happiness, financial and job security may be elusive. The world can be a bitter place.

As I?look at the faces of my offspring, I?realized I?misplaced a few years.

My eldest will soon mark her sweet 16 ? something I?never envisioned or prepared for.

I have forgotten about the times when our first-born learned to walk, talk and explore the world. These milestones ? huge at the time ? are now just swaddled in family albums. Sure, there are photos, videos and art that attest to these times ??frozen moments so long ago.

She's a teen, nearing the abyss that is adulthood.

She has very strong notions and she's passionate, giving, talented, funny and assertive.

Like her father, she worries a bit too much about things beyond her control.

Lexie wants to change the world. All the power to her.

My boy child, who will become a teenager this coming spring, continues to amaze, perplex and frustrate me.

Slugs, snails and puppy dogs' tails for certain.

I'm often so wrapped up in my own little idiosyncracies that I forget how important it is to raise a loving, caring, sensitive male offspring.

He constantly asks me questions and tests my abilities. I admit my answers are not as quick or spot-on as they used to be.

I over-compensate with sarcasm, which is a very handy skill if done properly.

I try to help, guide, teach and praise. I tell him I love him.

I love his curiosity and sense of adventure. But he, too, worries about the afterlife and the end of life on earth due to some cosmic catastrophe. Too much weight for small shoulders.

Our youngest can be as immovable as a brick wall. This eight-year-old ball of fire can go from an assertive know-it-all to sweet as sugar in the blink of an eye.

I have yet to figure any of them out completely.

And I have yet to get a handle on my own plight in this world, let alone be a prophetic mentor and moral compass.

But that's what I signed up for, and it's my full-time job to ensure the next generation makes the world a better place.

No pressure there.

I don't ponder how quickly time has passed ? what's the point?

What matters is whether I've spent it wisely over the years.

When I look at old vacation photos of my wife and I before we had kids, I smile. I was quite a guy, when I wore a younger man's clothes.

Borrowing on a sentiment from Kierkegaard, you can sometimes understand life backwards (in hindsight), but it has to be lived forwards.

And that is uncharted territory ??for everyone.

The demands of the world, and current economic realities, can kick us when we're already down. Job uncertainty, constantly rising prices and the cost of living, make wearing that smile a chore at times.

My little ones will soon become big. And they will get to understand these things all too well.

I can't arm them with wheelbarrows filled with cash. There's no trust fund or hidden vault.

What I can do is hold them, squeeze them, protect them, until it's time to let go.

Has any of this gotten me any closer to the proverbial meaning of life?

Not in the least.

I'm still learning.