

A trip down memory lane brings mixed emotions



MARK PAVILONS

They say we shouldn't dwell on the past. Nor should we ignore it. When it comes to family, regular trips down "memory lane" can be both enjoyable and reinvigorating. The expression is American in origin and the earliest instance that I have found is the title of a piece of music which was advertised for sale in the Wisconsin newspaper *The Milwaukee Daily News*, October 1876: "Wandering down sweet memory's lane." My wife was going through the gazillion photos on her iPhone and we stopped, shared, and revisited many family memories. Most caused us to laugh out loud. I smiled the whole time, then felt a bit melancholy about how quickly time passes. This is something we humans are all too familiar with. As a young man, with decades ahead of him, I seldom thought of what life would like "down the road." Well that road is quickly narrowing, and offering just a few more detours, on-ramps and alternate routes. "We are what we remember," Erik Pevernagie once said. "If we lose our memory, we lose our identity and our identity is the accumulation of our experiences. When we walk down the memory lane, it can be unconsciously, willingly, selectively, impetuously or sometimes grudgingly." We humans are a clever lot. We've created many euphemisms and quaint terms to paint a rosy picture of nostalgia. In fact, Merriam-Webster defines nostalgia as "a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition." Wow. Here I thought it was just a recognition of how things used to be. Of course, our nostalgic tendencies tend to grow as we age. When gray hair appears in the image looking back at us in the mirror, we begin to look in that rearview mirror more often. Haruki Murakami said memories not only warm you up from the inside, but "they're also what tear you apart." Just think about it folks. Every single one of us is made up of thousands of feelings, millions of thoughts and tons of memories. Just how do we process such a massive amount of heartfelt data? Of course, our experiences in life are important, both good and bad. We can't, and shouldn't, forget them. We learn from them, become stronger because of them. They are part of who we are, there's no denying it. Some of us remember everything, while others, like myself, need some prompting. My wife can recall special moments like they were yesterday. Her ability to recount every detail is impeccable. I would never argue about it. Memory is our personal diary, filling pages of our lives. It's very personal and sometimes it's difficult to share for a number of reasons. But most of us, especially as we age, love to share stories, timeless tales of love, life and living. While some of the messages and innuendo are lost on the current generation, we still like to weave these stories. And, they often become a way of self-healing, filling us with bits and pieces of who we once were, during a time when life was, well, less stressful and filled with hope and dreams. I hope that one day, technology will present the ultimate gift to mankind "a way of digitally preserving all of our memories. Wouldn't that be the trip of a lifetime? Well, some would be rather shaky amusement park rides to be sure, but others would be joyful splashes of colour and sounds. As we gain wisdom, which definitely comes with time, we offer up sage-like sentiments to our young. I often quote Yoda in telling my kids, "do or do not, there is no try." They now know who Yoda is. We try to relay moments of our youth, and itty, bitty tidbits from our parents. More often than not, most are archaic, since that generation was, shall I say, less informed and ill equipped to deal with complex child-related issues. A swift slap to the back of the head, or "because I told you to," were the most-often referred to pages of my dad's parenting text. Sure, my mom was loving and much more realistic and understanding. But they came from different worlds, at times, suffering horrible war-time events. They struggled, as most immigrants did. Their stories

are fading now, as are memories of their faces. They do come and speak to me in my dreams, but my nocturnal meanderings offer little in the way of comfort or enlightenment. The crappy thing about memory is you always have to say goodbye, and those sad farewells stick with you, like a chill you can't shake. But maybe we should consider ourselves lucky because saying goodbye is so hard! It's been said that we shouldn't spend our money on things, but rather on ways to generate memories. Thankfully, we had the opportunity to create a decade-long family tradition of annual treks to the Delawana Inn. All of our kids recall their times there with fondness. My wife and I aren't in the position to give our kids the world, but we can give them some unforgettable memories. And I think that's why our days should be spent forming new ones, in a positive, fun way. Sure, our daily chores and burdens tend to douse our enthusiasm, but I think we can all aim a little higher. I'll be the first to admit, it's not easy, but I am trying to fill the pages with a story our kids will enjoy re-reading, over and over. As you go through your photo files, on your desktop or mobile device, take a moment to pause and reflect. Create a new folder entitled "best memories" and share them with family and friends. Make it a point to fill this file completely!