

Let's recognize and welcome breaths of fresh air?



MARK PAVILONS

We've all used the phrase "a breath of fresh air" in our lives. While typically used to describe someone or something that brings a refreshing and positive change to a situation, I've found a new meaning - an inhale of epic proportions, brought about by a joyful encounter. I had a couple recently. One happened while enjoying lunch with a long-time King resident. It was a social time, to catch up and just discuss life and all of its trials and tribulations. While the conversation ranged from my health issues to raising children, it reminded me of why I love my job - the people I meet. Life isn't about things, or possessions, it's about encounters, experiences and being able to grow as a human because of them. My friends, we are all friends, acquaintances, teachers, mentors, sounding boards and storytellers. We feed off one another's energy. I've known this for some time, but I've forgotten how refreshing it can be. The weight on my shoulders has been tilting my walk and taking away from things that made me feel, well, like myself. An open mind, they say, is like an open window - it lets the fresh air in. Ernesto Bertarelli reminds us that while we can't change who we are or what we're going through, we can refresh what you're thinking about, you can put some fresh air in your brain. "Quite right. I love summer, the fresh air on my face and the wind blowing through my hair. Anyone can enjoy these things, while driving in your car, sitting on a park bench, or playing catch with your dog in an wide open field. Listening to the trees sway and even a nearby babbling brook are benefits of this rock we're on. They're free to enjoy by all, if only we took the time to pause and reflect. Of course, people make the world go around, and are our lives are shaped by human interaction. We are capable of many things and are more than willing to help lend a hand when called upon. Encouragement is awesome. Think about it. It has the capacity to lift a man's or a woman's shoulders. To breathe fresh air into the fading embers of a smoldering dream. To actually change the course of another human being's day, week, or life," said Charles R. Swindoll. My cancer journey has impacted almost every aspect of my life. I've held off making long-term plans and I've felt isolated, holed up in my office, cut off from the world. My computer and email are my lifelines to the community and the people who I have come to know and love. I am happy to converse with anyone, anytime. My columns are open and honest reflections of what I've become and I'm sorry if they've dwelled on my hardships. It's quite a departure from who I used to be. That being said, we are social creatures and we depend on connections with others. Meaningful relationships lead to more fulfilling lives. I've stayed in touch with everyone in my work circles and we've made a concerted effort on the home front for more family dinners and events. I must admit that I miss those face-to-face interactions that were so abundant just a few short years ago (post-COVID). This recent lunch once again shifted my perspective. It allowed me to speak openly, share stories and jokes and as Billy Joel said, "to forget about life for a while." Why is this? As neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman says, "Evolution has placed a bet that the best thing for our brain to do in any spare moment is to get ready to see the world socially." We are always preparing for our next social interaction, to engage with the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of other people. Another "event" came courtesy of a long-time friend and former teacher. She dropped by to basically pass on her strength and prayers. In a way, she shared some universal truths about love, self-worth and healing. Yes, it was a lot to take in during a short visit on a Friday afternoon. But the gesture, and genuine compassion, spoke volumes, not only about the person she is, but what she sees in others. That's a gift, to be sure. I envy those who have unflinching strength - in themselves, their talents and their faith. It's like having a superpower. Of course,

no power comes without a great deal of self-sacrifice, personal soul-searching and embracing grace. When we empower, support and encourage those around us, we create a feeling where everyone feels seen, valued and inspired. Lifting others up ??through simple acts of kindness ? creates a ripple effect. Offering words of encouragement can shift someone's entire perspective. Simply being a source of positivity by showing up with kindness, patience, and an open heart can make all the difference, according to Melony Johnson. We simple humans are not just a mish-mash of bones, blood and DNA. Oh, no. We're much, much more. We are the sum of all who came before us. We are extensions of all that is good in the universe. We are part of the cosmos. We have been given a tremendous gift and legacy, passed down by average folk, altruists, creators, leaders, builders, prophets and even the messiah. Believe what you will, but we are not here by accident, mistake or mishap. We are designed to be who we are, with a dash of the brightest of lights. And that design encourages us to go out, to give, to empower, to enlighten and to love. We are inspired to comfort, revitalize, and yes, refresh. That breath of fresh air can come from each and every one of us. Let's let loose and offer ?refreshments??to all of our brothers and sisters.