

I'm coming up on a landmark year. Here's a hint – I was born three weeks before Disneyland opened. The current ad campaign on television about the upcoming 50th Anniversary celebrations for “The Happiest Place on Earth” certainly brings smiles to the faces of my near and dear ones plus grins, giggles and knowing glances in my direction. I wish I could say I'm sailing through it all like a majestic ship on a gentle sea but I feel more like a rusty tramp steamer desperately hove-to in the trough of some great and heartless wave.

In my defense I can say it hasn't been a terribly terrific couple of years. There have been moments of wonder, yes, and even some of the quiet joy that comes to us all if we take the time to recognize it tiptoeing by the window. In comparison to many of the souls inhabiting this planet I have blessings beyond counting. And don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining; after all the one good thing about living even this long is, as a few people have pointed out, it sure beats the alternative.

One positive I can check off my list is that, in regard to disposable parts, I still have an appendix and tonsils for the doctors to remove before they can start hacking away at things I'm still using. I'm also pleased to say the renewable bits--knees, hips, corneas--haven't started to show any permanent signs of wear so I won't be going into the shop for those replacement parts just yet.

In the interests of keeping my feet this side of the sod, my dear family doctor recently read me the riot act on salt. She also took a few minutes to persuade me I may wish to part with some of the extra poundage I've picked up over the years. It would appear I'm at the stage where it isn't so much a matter of contemplating how much time I have to enjoy the simple pleasures of life but rather how many of them will be left for me to enjoy in the time remaining.

I have also reached that particular age where there are fewer people around who remember me way back when I was young. This isn't necessarily a bad thing: while there may be only a few folk who remember what a cute little elf I was, there are also fewer people to disagree with my version of events 'lo those many years ago. And, of course, there are fewer people to recall those amusing moments I'd much rather forget, like being six years old and throwing up all over the new gym floor. In front of the bishop. And my parents. And everyone.

Outside of Esquimalt and the maritime provinces--where people are “from away” to the third generation--ties to friends from school and even early adult years tend to fall by the wayside. We move around, move on and frequently wrap children and spouses around us as an excuse for not keeping in touch. I make the exception of this small sliver of the planet as I have met an alarming number of Esquimaltarians who have not only grown up here but settle down to raise their families all of two blocks from where they were born.

Somehow I have managed to keep a friend from high school. She went to the same school as a fellow I fancied and I went to the school her boyfriend attended. Not exactly a bedrock foundation for a relationship that has outlasted several boyfriends, one failed marriage (mine), separation by a mountain range and a husband with a pathological fear of snakes(hers) that prevented any trips to Victoria for several years.

Over the years we have changed a great deal and not very much at the same time. Whenever I'm in Edmonton we get together for lunch and a chance to catch up. Sometimes we have the luxury of an afternoon to wander around a golf course or to watch my two girls playing with her two boys. On one of those beautiful crisp December nights stubble jumpers live for, she took my family on a tobogganing excursion complete with snowsuits for my precious wet-landers. In my one ride down the hill I was a child again, free for a few precious minutes from the burden of laying my father to rest.

A few weeks ago I was in Edmonton again. For the year and a half since Dad died there

has been only one place my mom really wanted to be. Under the bright prairie sun, her family and friends came together as she was finally allowed to take her place once again at his side. The sadness of the occasion was made bearable by the presence of those who remembered her when she was young, when she laughed easily, had time to listen and time to help. People who remembered her as I did when she was that centre of the world only a mom can be.

The day before the funeral there was time for lunch with Lorraine. We talked about husbands, children and where we would find ourselves at the end of the day: the usual complaints, concerns and fears friends talk about. She was at the funeral and, even though we didn't have time to talk, it wasn't necessary. The important part is knowing there are people, friends and family, who carry moments of your life with them: to know that the part of you it takes six people to shoulder out to your final share of this earth is a very small fraction of what we actually leave behind.