

We Remember Letter

by Glenn Fraser

Hello Everyone

We are in the midst of a pandemic. Everyone is expected to stay home. Do not go out in public. In fact, Do not go out anywhere !

Fourteen days seemed long, but with each passing week the days in isolation seem even longer. We don't know how long this pandemic is going to last - weeks, even months. I think of myself as a people person. I like being with people. I enjoy the pleasure of seeing a person's face, their body language, their personality. For people like me, this is a rough challenge, Yes, we talk to people on the phone. We communicate by Email. But it's not the same. It pales in comparison. So, what do we do?

Science tells us two very important things. We get smarter as we age but we can't remember things as well as we used to. Our argument is that our brains are so full of facts and figures that it just takes a bit longer to retrieve them. The other thing is that our long-term memory increases while our short-term memory decreases. Unfortunately for our short-term memory it's true. At least it's true in my case.

What do you know about your grandparents? Where did they meet? When did they meet? Why did they choose a specific place for their wedding? How did they feel when they bought their first house? What value systems were popular at that time and did they have their own?

You could ask the same questions about your own parents. The chances are they have never written down the answers to hundreds of questions you might have. Nor have you.

What are you going to leave for your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren? The chilling facts are: We are born. We live. We die. All that we have to pass on to our descendants are memories. There is an expression that states "What You Are Was What You Were When". It simply means that your lives, those of your parents, and those of your grandparents were dictated by the value systems and mores of their society

I remember the Cold War and the emergency shelters people built in those years. Our children and grandchildren know nothing of these experiences.

I urge you to sit down and write down your memories. Maybe one of your great-great-grandchildren will be fascinated by what you wrote. You never know but they will thank you. I am culling family photographs of the past - people whom I know nothing about and photographs without any names or dates on the back. I wish I knew who they were.

Sometimes I lie in bed at night, trying to get to sleep, while my mind races back to my childhood, my school days and my travelling. I can remember childhood playmates and experiences that I have not thought about for decades. (Even the word 'decades' is frightening.) During this time memories flash through my brain. Perhaps the worst thing about memories is that I can remember the names of the boys but I cannot remember the names of some of the girls. I admit the girls are far more interesting to me than the boys! I have no idea of their married names or how their lives turned out. I hope they had wonderful lives and that they were very happy throughout their own lives.

BUT, here is the problem. I would love to go back into my past and talk to these people. Most of them are my age and I hope they are grandparents with loving children and grandchildren. I would love to go back in time and talk to my parents. Hello Mom. Hello Dad. This is what happened to me after you left. Most of all, I miss you !

So what do I do now? What I want is impossible but I have time on my side. While I stay at home in isolation I can do very little. I don't want to watch the news every day. It's almost too depressing. I am getting tired of television programs. I can only do so much reading.

So what do I do now? I'm going to write down the names of people I remember and some of the memories I have in my head. My memories of traveling to Sydney and Melbourne are still fresh in my mind and I can still remember my emotions when I stepped off the ship in Sydney after spending time in New Zealand. It's funny. Those memories are as clear as yesterday.

So what do I do now? I am going to encourage you to do the same. You've got time on your hands. Think about writing down the names of the people you have known throughout your own lifetime. Think about the good times you have had. Write down your memories. It's a fact you really know very little about your own parents. They didn't talk about themselves in those days and they definitely did not share their memories with you as a child.

I can tell you it's a wonderful thing to think about some of the people you have met. Each person contributed to "who you are now". Every person in your past influenced who you are today. In your own mind, say hello to them as you write. You'll think of new names almost daily. Write down their names and write down the events in your own life that are memorable, but

concentrate more on the present, not the past. Decide what you want your future to be. There is a saying that has always been attributed to Lao-Tzu. “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

My past is my past. The truth is I am really not overly interested in who I was. I’m only interested in who I am now, and who I’m going to be. The present is more important than the past, so I’m going to concentrate on the present. The future will be what I make it to be.

Oh I forgot to tell you. Your story is an open story. You can go back and change it anytime you want. As you think of other people, add them wherever you wish. Your life’s story has no rigid sequence and it has no end.

I wish you good luck coping during these weeks (and perhaps months) of isolation. Writing down names, memories and plans for the present and future fills the time wonderfully well.

I started a few days ago and finished yesterday. I have given copies to my wife, my daughter and my two sons.

Think about it. Your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will want to know about you.

Please, for them, start now.

Glenn Fraser

Toronto, Canada