

Six degrees of separation

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There are a handful of events in life that really call for a celebration.

We're all born and we all die and presumably there will be a celebration or ceremony for both of those occasions, although you won't be able to appreciate either of them even though they are about you.

Along the way there will be a few other times that people celebrate occasions other than the standard holidays.

It's the anniversary of your birth, and whoever you see on a regular basis will wish you a happy birthday and you'll probably get a birthday card from your Aunt Mabel in Saskatoon and these days you'll get birthday greetings on Facebook from some people you have met only once, or maybe never.

There will be graduations to celebrate a milestone in your education. Although no one other than immediate family really cares much about those.

You finally graduated high school - so what? So did everyone else standing around you in their fancy graduation gowns. After a single night of handing out diplomas that no employer will ever ask to see, your parents and grandparents will tell you how proud they are of you for doing something that 200 other kids in your graduating class also did ? you're not special.

Usually the next big step are weddings. As a generation hits a certain age you've got a few years of family weddings on the go.

Around the world, weddings are seen as a big deal. In some countries a wedding celebration can last for days ? and there is a reason for this.

You are uniting two families and beginning the next step of creating an entirely new generation ? it's a big deal.

If you do it right, in 50 years you can celebrate your golden anniversary and look back at a life altering event in a good light.

If you don't do it right, well, that's a whole different story.

However, weddings do one thing that a lot of other celebrations don't ? they provide the opportunity to meet all those relatives and friends you haven't seen in years. The great aunts and uncles, second cousins you barely remember, and that favourite cousin you remember from growing up but they moved away and you haven't seen them for years.

Everyone looks older, except you of course ? you haven't changed a bit.

The final celebration of sorts is when someone leaves this life.

Set aside a funeral for a younger person who died too soon. That of course is tragic and a right of passage no one wants to celebrate. However, when someone has lived a long and fulfilling life, this seems to be the place where the six degrees of separation really comes into play.

Unlike most other events, a funeral draws people who have a connection not only to the deceased but also their family through a network of social interaction. Friends, family, co-workers, club members, motorcycle riding buddies, or the just the waitress who served granddad his breakfast at the diner for the past 30 years might make an appearance just to say goodbye.

Funerals, as they say, are for the living.

Over the past couple of years I have attended a few funerals where it really did become a celebration for the living.

On one occasion, a friend's mother had died. In the end it came as more of a relief than anything else.

However, when I arrived at the funeral home, it became a reunion with people I hadn't seen in years. Friends, friend's parents, high school classmates ? we were all there ? and we all shared a common bond through our church, our school, and the deceased. I spent a couple of hours just reconnecting and reminiscing over good times.

This past spring I was invited to a funeral for a neighbour and former co-worker. Again I was pleasantly surprised to meet around a dozen or more people I hadn't seen in over ten years.

They were all former co-workers from when we had all worked for a large company together.

I had lunch with a former office mate and we had a lot to catch up on ? and the conversation seemed to pickup from the last one we had in the company cafeteria over a decade ago, as if no real time had elapsed.

Through those degrees of separation and a once in lifetime (you only die once!) event there can always come some good.

The sad part is quite often someone has to die before those degrees of separation finally meet.