

Consider ourselves very lucky



Mark Pavilons]

If you have money in the bank, some in your wallet and a few coins in your pocket, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you can read my column, you are more fortunate than the 3 billion illiterate souls on this planet.

If you have food in the fridge, clothes on your back and a roof over your head, you are more fortunate than 75% of people in the world.

If you woke up healthy this morning, you're much better off than the 1 million people who will die this week.

And if you never experienced war, imprisonment, torture or starvation, you are luckier than 500 million people who are alive and suffering at this very moment.

Most of us are well aware of these almost unbelievable world-wide statistics. On a planet of more than 6 billion, is it any wonder we have such disparity, disease, starvation and death?

There's no shortage of grim statistics, both here at home and around the globe.

In the U.S., the world's superpower and one of the most advanced nations on the planet, more than 225,000 rural households lack indoor plumbing and more than 600,000 households still do not have basic water and sanitation services that most of us take for granted. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau noted more than 16% of the population lived in poverty and in 2013, child poverty reached record-high levels, with 16.7 million children living in food insecure households.

To put that number in perspective, that's more than the entire population of Ontario.

I'm not sure about current stats in Canada, but it's been well publicized that Canadians are currently burdened by record high levels of personal debt.

Living pay cheque to pay cheque is no longer a rarity, but commonplace in our land of opportunity.

For those who've travelled to disadvantaged countries, poverty is more blatant and more shocking. Even in a nation like India, which we regard as being a hotbed of technology, a substantial portion of the population live in extreme poverty. A local minister noted most people have cell phones in that country, but there are fewer land lines and the majority of work is done by manual labour, and not automated factories.

We are the lucky ones, even though it doesn't appear that way sometimes.

My mettle is tested weekly, by the things like ever-rising household costs; the demands of three children; car repairs; insurance and the like. Many of us work simply to survive.

How close are we to that grey line of abject poverty ??a lost job or month's worth of missed mortgage payments?

Human nature is such that we either long for more, or complain about things we lack. Given the list of blessings we take for granted that I mentioned at the outset of this column, I'd say most of us really don't lack anything. Sure, most people's lives could be better or stand a little improvement. Fine-tuning or tweaking one's plight in life can be done. We can move up the ladder, albeit one rung at a time.

For many of our brothers and sisters around the globe, their place in life is set, and in fact has been so for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Again, we are the lucky ones.

Think about it. A 'bent' or 'broken' family tree and we could have ended up being born to poor, Third World parents. Or, the worst-case scenario ? we wouldn't have been born at all.

But we are here, today, talking about this issue. That very fact meant our ancestors survived ? they overcome horrible odds; beat disease, starvation and the spoils of war; lived through The Plague or more recently, the influenza outbreak at the end of the First World War that claimed 50-70 million lives, the worst in human history. It killed 50,000 Canadians, compared to 60,000 lost during the Great War.

In that one single incident, generations of families perished and literally millions of family trees vanished from the history books.

But you and I survived, somehow. Our distant relatives escaped to continue on.

Is this by luck, by design or some divine intervention?

We will never know. But now that we're here, firmly planted and rooted in our Canadian homeland, we can only move further ahead from here.

While we may suffer hurdles, setbacks, injuries, twists, turns, trials and tribulations we are backed by generations of our ancestors.

They're looking over our shoulders from their heavenly perches, guiding us gently to carry on.

By ensuring our children are not only healthy and well fed, we arm them with the essentials to meet life's challenges head-on. We send them out into the world to make their way; make progress and make a difference.

We can't predict the future. Nor can we prevent another global pandemic from occurring, and threatening half the population. Our family trees are fragile.

What we can do is take heed. We can take comfort in knowing we are among the minority who are fed, clothed, have shelter and a few coins in our pockets.

We are the lucky ones!