

When you can't be all things to all people

Pete & Shelley Aarssen - September 2023

Full disclosure! This column is on me, Pete. While Shelley and I share the responsibility for the ideas and content of our written efforts, she is away volunteering at a girl's camp and the column deadline is up. It's really my turn anyway; she has been carrying the bulk of the responsibility of late. Why this column title? Well, if your life is anything like ours, you may be being pulled in many directions and by people you care about and sometimes care for! This often happens while juggling one's work demands, volunteer responsibilities, home upkeep efforts and while attempting to have, dare I say, time for leisure! Ok, I got a little frazzled this summer. July and August saw more things external to our intended personal game plan for us to attend to, than we ever imagined! Now, we created some of these demands ourselves, exaggerating our availability, saying yes to optional commitments before really contemplating our schedules. Happily, Shelley and I still have our moms, both 86 years young and while our support to them fluctuates, when they do need our support and our four adult kids do at the same time... or speaking more generically, when the circumstances of your work, role within the organizations you volunteer time towards, or when home projects or minor disasters occur and you are called upon simultaneously to be all things to all people, what can you do? There's just one answer: Be what you can be... in the circumstances you find yourself in. This summer has been peculiar for us in its cadence of good and bad weather days changing our plans and more unexpected requests being made from people we really care about than we expected while needing and wanting to give of our time and support to our moms, our children, and our grandchildren. Hey, we've survived, and in the process, we have built some great memories and registered some new personal bests in terms of our ability, postmortem, to have multi-tasked! When we have been able to get together with our friends this summer, we have learned that we are by no means alone! So, what to do!? I'm not sure there are any standard operating procedures to be found for responding well to the speed of life (if there are, please email me a copy) but here's a thought! All of us are old enough to realize that our best laid plans for our desired activities; social, familial, work, volunteer and even faith-based activities can fall victim to the same consequence as when one might sit down to thanksgiving supper. You know, having eaten well of the rich variety of excellent foods we cannot seem to be able to eat something from all the items presented and we respond, 'I guess my eyes were bigger than my stomach'. So yes, expecting some collateral damage to colliding priorities would be a healthy start and then, becoming comfortable with the result! We didn't get to do everything we'd hoped to do this summer. In some cases, we did more things but of a nature that we didn't plan. In hindsight though, these experiences were quite eventful and necessary so the things that we intended to do and didn't accomplish must not have been all that necessary! I guess we can all work at becoming more thankful for the privilege it is to participate in so many facets of life, those expected and those unexpected. When you come to think about it, not having complete control over our plans helps to develop, rather spontaneously, the many chapters in what will turn out to be our book of life. If this past summer is any indication, its shaping up to be a pretty good read!