



Sidewalk Wrinkles

With every slurp of latte and every bite of organic blueberry scone, I'm struck with what a difference 70 years makes—or doesn't. I'm in a coffee shop that used to be a residence in a neighborhood where I lived when I was about 4 years old. If this shop had been here in 1952, lattes would have been absent from the menu. Espresso would've been relegated to beatnik joints. Organic? Vegan? Gluten-free? All unheard of.

Most houses in this neighborhood were built between 1910 and 1930. The young working families who bought them grew old, and by the 1970s many homes had fallen into disrepair. Then in the '80s and '90s younger people began buying up houses and fixing them, resulting in charming vintage homes with neatly trimmed yards on quiet, tree-lined streets.

It's a great place for a post-coffee dog walk. A few blocks later we're in the small park where my parents took me as a toddler. It seems vaguely familiar. In 1952, I was fascinated by F-86s thundering through the sky. Today I'm just as distracted by thundering F-15s. I look down and notice moss-filled embossments dating the sidewalk to 1913, when the only thing in the sky was perhaps a Curtiss Model E.

A few more blocks and we near the house where I lived with my parents and our dog Skooter. It's a sturdy brick house with a high-pitched Elizabethan roof, a solid oak arch-topped front door and a small fish pond in the backyard. I remember my mom chasing me around the living room trying to keep my fingers out of electrical outlets. My dad's studio was in the basement—sort of dark and dank. He looked forward to the time when he could have a studio/office above ground with daylight—out in the country (which is exactly where we moved next). As I walk and gaze at the house, other memories begin to surface and...SMACK!

Suddenly the 110-year-old sidewalk hits me in the face—or vice versa. My dog turns and regards me with puzzlement. I get up, a little dazed,

looking around to make sure no one has seen my ineptitude. The thing about 1913 sidewalks is that tree roots have lifted parts of them to the point of being hazardous. I regularly hike rocky forest trails—but usually I'm paying attention. Today I'm in the past.

If there's a lesson here, it might be: Considering the past is good, but not so much while you're navigating the present. They are two different tasks, and doing them simultaneously can lead to a slapstick nosedive—or an untimely death.

You might think: Can't the past help us navigate the present? Yeah—sometimes—but things change. Those wrinkles in the sidewalk weren't there 70 years ago. It takes time, contemplation and perspective to process our history and apply it to the present. And *not every issue that pops up in the now can be governed by the then.*

I don't even like to say it, but the older we get, the more of a past we have—which can distract us from focusing on today. Sadly, some folks get to the point where they can't move forward at all—either angry over the past or pining for the (often mythical) happy days of yore. Either way, they've lost the knack of navigating the now. It's a good thing the arrow of time moves forward, otherwise many would willingly regress to yesteryear and just stay there. Religion is often no help, as it can be a backward-looking affair, obsessing on traditions and requirements whose purpose has been lost in time.

But Jesus' teaching, while remembering the past, is firmly grounded in the now, in the future and in eternity. In his Sermon on the Mount, he contrasts what was said to "them of old time" with what he says now—and he is the final Word. Jesus offers us the perspective to look back with forgiveness, fondness and even joy—while *living our lives fully in the present, and anticipating the future.* He also offers us vision to step over some of those wrinkles in the sidewalk of life—or to laugh uproariously at ourselves when we stumble! □

—Monte Wolverton