

Defining Cool

By: Leslie A. Davidson

My new home is a condo for people aged 55 or older. The building is a stucco shoebox painted an indeterminate orangey-pink with green trim, accented by long balconies and faux, multi-paned windows. It is sturdy, well maintained and very quiet. So what is my problem? If I am honest, it's that it just isn't very cool. I loved our former house; it was old and funky and, to my mind, gracious. And I thought it was very cool.

And now I live in a box inside a box. The view from the living room window is breathtakingly beautiful but the building itself — meh

I spent a lot of the last year mourning Lincoln's illness. I struggled to be at peace with what is, to inhabit a fragile world of ephemeral joys and not let the goons of self-pity and despair define my life. I fell in love with the other residents in his care facility, an unexpected gift, but in that one year, almost half of them died. Death, death at the end of a long life well-lived, even death that ends suffering, is hard and sad. My heart broke for grieving families and for the staff, who cared deeply and had no choice but to carry on, in moments of acute sorrow, because there were the needs of the living to be attended to.

The move for Lincoln has meant a whole new cottage of frail but oh, so easy to love residents and another team of committed, admirable caregivers. It feels a little like an invitation to even more grief, caring about my neighbours in the condo, who are mostly a decade or two, even three, my seniors.

But one neighbor, who visits her husband in the hospital, on the same twice-daily schedule as I visit Lincoln, offers to drive me for my dinnertime visits. Thanks to Parkinson's my night vision isn't really vision but a dancing blur of lights. Trippy...but not safe at any speed. She wears her worry about her husband with humour and a matter of fact acceptance that humbles me. I met her yesterday in Pharmasave. She was filling her basket with half-price decorative tree branches.

These will be beautiful on the balcony next year! she enthused, a lover of lights.

I met another neighbor in the hallway today, a spry older man up a tall ladder, changing light bulbs in the stair well. I asked about his Christmas.

Good, he told me, strange to be on my own.

He said his wife died earlier this month but wasn't he lucky to have had the company of his brother and his family for the holidays.

I brought home the turkey carcass, he said. I made soup for the first time in my life. I had it for lunch today. It was all right.

I think tonight, as I sit in the quiet in my not-very-cool building, I think there are harder things to live with than sorrow. Loneliness for one. Apathy, perhaps. Or selfishness. I think that I have lots to learn from my new neighbours. I think how lucky I am to have these brave, resilient souls around me. I think that where I live just might be very, very cool.