

Collecting Memories

By Dante Harker

The Filipino nurse smiled as she walked past the two old men, the pair grunted and snored as they slept in two plush, high-backed chairs, their hands never parting, their memories entwined.

One dreamt of the time they came face-to-face with a leviathan, a monster of the blue, mouth wide, a dump truck of the sea.

The other felt the grains of a thousand beaches under his toes, the memory of their continuous search for the perfect white sand.

'Do you remember?' an ancient voice shouted, the words drifting at the end, this was the old man's war cry, much used and, when the other wasn't able to recall, a box was deftly pulled from a nearby table and dug into with the glee and anticipation of a child's Christmas.

Worn and tired each man's face, yet each line recalled a memory of a life well spent, a life lived, one of adventure and

countless detours, of a route not set, of a path not laid.

More past than future held little worry for the two grumpy travelers, for they had seen more than most.

Each thankful now that they had not listened to the pressure of society, a call to settle, to lay down roots, to climb property and career ladders and to collect material things, not memories.

Each had possessions greater than any physical thing; each had knowledge, wisdom and an annoyingly smug grin.

`What would you say?' said one.

`What?' replied the other.

`To you, if you were you, 70 years ago?'

`What?' the older of the two asked again.

`You know, if you could get hold of one of those time machines they've been advertising on the super, super, super, super, super, super, super flat screen, HD, 3D TV?'

`TV?' the older man yelled, not because he had to yell for any particular reason, he just did it because he knew how much it annoyed the nosy neighbor who lived next door.

`Yes, TV, come on, what would you say?'

Finally understanding what his husband was after he said, `I would tell me to be brave, remind myself that I can deal with whatever is put in front of me.'

He continued, `I would tell myself to man-up, to say "yes" more, truly to live by the mantra "life is about collecting memories".'

He thought for a moment longer, drifted into a dream and then shook himself so he could add, `actually now, after all these years, I know that it's not just that, it's not collecting memories as a man would collect butterflies - remember them?'

`What?' the younger man had drifted off, he had been called to sleep by the memory of a deserted beach when the two of them had baked the day away in the sun.

`I was talking about butterflies, but that's not important, stay with me, it's your question I'm answering.'

`Get on with it then,' the younger man chided, he didn't want to mention that he'd forgotten what the question was that he'd originally asked.

`I would tell my 70-years-ago self that to collect a memory you have to live it first, be in it, hold in the moment, and be so much in the moment that you don't know that you are in it until the moment has gone.

Say "yes" to all things that have the potential to leave a wonderful memory, treat memories as something to be sought, to be hunted and to be prized above all other things.

I would tell myself to live, to love and to never allow fear to stand in my way.

`So collect memories then?' the younger man asked.

`Were you listening? Sometimes, my handsome man, I think my words vanish with the wind.'

`I heard, and I agree, I just wonder if that advice would be like preaching to the converted?'

`What do you mean?'

The younger man held up his finger and pointed at not one box, but ten or more.

He pointed to the attic, to a spare room, memory boxes everywhere.

`Oh, I see,' the older man said, his face bright with a smile of achievement, the smile of a life well lived, of learning from regrets, of living in the moment and for the moment.

He squeezed the hand of his life-long love, and both men drifted back into dreams of the amazing places, of the bold and the wonder they had seen.
