

Attachments come and go

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I began thinking about attachments after I was unable to open one that tagged behind an incoming email. Some attachments of this type are as friendly as pups looking to be adopted. Others are inexplicably hostile and refuse to play.

I know some people who believe that the fewer their attachments -- to spouses, children, mortgages, ideologies, places, goals and anything with moving parts -- the better. Problems, they say, follow attachments like, well, like attachments.

These folks have a point. Attachments can be messy, and sooner or later, most seem to turn in that direction. No attachment is maintenance-free, particularly those connecting two beating hearts.

It's always easier to start an attachment than to end one. Most attachments cannot be deleted with a tap of a finger. But email has led us into thinking that quick and easy is the same as right and true.

In my 60s, I've been unconsciously paring down my own attachments to things, both big and small. I've realized that I don't care intensely about almost all the stuff in my life.

This doesn't mean, of course, that I'm pitching anything I no longer need or care about. Divestment requires a boldness of vision and a clarity of objective that I lack, even if I were so motivated, which I am not.

Perhaps I would feel differently about attachments to objects, keepsakes and stuff in general had I been a refugee.

Had I been forced to flee for my life with nothing but what I had in my head, objects -- both those left behind and those subsequently acquired -- might take on great importance. Alternatively, refugee survivors might conclude that both types of objects are no more than the temporary furnishings in an apartment we occupy on a short-term lease.

Like everyone else, I have things that are invested with memories. But I could get along without them.

If a house fire broke out right now, what would I save first?

An armload of the irreplaceable. Photographs. Melissa's jewelry. A drawing from my cousin. A sculpture my mother made. My grandfather's pocketwatch. A couple of personal files.

And one other thing—a folder that's sitting in the middle of our dining-room table, which contains five pounds of my 2013 tax receipts. Isn't that sick?

On the other hand, I've grown more attached to where I live, both house and place. Despite a wind-chill factor of 55 below this week, I'm not looking for winter quarters in Florida or even a sailboat with headroom anchored off Virgin Gorda. My lack of interest in getting warm can only be explained by acknowledging a good deal of shared genetics with the musk ox.

It's also true that I've been captured by the routine and familiarity of current circumstances. Both grow stronger as I close the gap toward age 70. It's a bother to start somewhere fresh when you're not.

I've noticed that I've reattached attachments with some individuals with whom I once shared time. After 50 years of silence, I've now caught up with a dozen or so high-school classmates and a handful from college.

Maybe life -- or at least mine -- tracks high school more than college. Or maybe the unseen bonds of the earlier four years are stronger than those of the next four.

There's a rubber-band feel to this reattaching. We stretched it out, and now it's pulling us back in. I think we all sense that sand is slipping through our hourglass.

I've also tried to keep in touch with some women I liked. This can get a little tricky.

There are, of course, issues back there with each one, some of which were not resolved or not resolved well.

One, I sense, is reluctant to catch up, let alone talk. I think she's afraid. Another, I sense, believes in letting sleeping dogs stay asleep. Reconnecting is a matter of mutual choice, not obligation.

I like how these women turned out. I'm proud of what they've done and who they are.

These quick dips are not flirting exactly. They're more like affirmations of something back upstream, which we both acknowledge even though we understand that we've long left that spot in the river.

Bottom lines (which these are): Some attachments can be reopened in a different format. Others should remain as bygones.

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