Remembering the past/Embracing the Future

“The good new days are today and better days are coming tomorrow.”
-- Senator Hubert Humphrey, 38th Vice-President of the United States

I love music, always have. When I think about music, I’m reminded of the time spent in Henrietta Cooper’s Grade 7 music class and choir. Henrietta had an appreciation for music, especially the old wartime numbers. She would coach, encourage, and shepherd our ensemble as we stumbled through the harmonies and tripped over high notes.

Choir practice was particularly difficult one afternoon as some of the boys insisted on making up their own words to the songs. I recall a line, “In the sky three doves were flying,” coming out as “In the sky three ducks are dying.” By the end of class, Henrietta was rubbing her temples. She set her glasses on her desk and dropped into a chair.

“Some days I really don’t know why I bother.”

I gathered up my books and approached Henrietta’s desk.

She perched her glasses back on her nose and looked over cat’s eye-shaped lenses.

“Mrs. Cooper,” I said. “It might help if we sang some newer songs?”

She studied my young face for a time before responding. “Newer songs?”

“I think that’s why the guys are cutting up. They don’t like singing these old songs.”

“These old songs are classics. They’re beautiful. A joy to hear and to sing.”

“People are writing new songs every day,” I said. “Maybe the best songs haven’t even been written yet.” I hiked my books up under my arm. “Just something to think about.”

The following week, we added two new (and now classic) songs to our repertoire.

In our rosy remembrances of the past, we can sometimes lose sight of a bright future. We can be so focused on old songs and accomplishments that we fail to make room in our lives for new opportunities and possibilities. Certainly, the past needs to be honoured. It has been the source of all lessons – a paving stone, a roadway to this moment.

To honour the past is not simply to remember the good times or wish we were back there with old friends. When you honour the past, you take the wisdom acquired and the lessons learned and use them to build a life of empowerment and service to others.
There will always be people who believe the world’s greatest inventions have already been invented, the greatest innovations already innovated, the greatest songs already sung. The aware individual honours the past, yet embraces the future. Every hardship, every triumph has become a tool to build a better, stronger, and more meaningful life. They face the future with an attitude of optimism and confident expectation.

Embracing the future means we do not fear the challenges ahead. The past has provided us with a solid foundation and the wisdom to recognize and make use of opportunities in the moment. A wise man once penned, “These are the good old days.” If we’re able to recognize and appreciate the magic of each moment, we’ll never be caught pining away for the past, dwelling on old triumphs, or finding beauty only in the old songs.

Do you believe that your greatest songs are still unsung? Will you joyously welcome tomorrow and all the tomorrows to come? Don’t let the classic songs of your past blind you to a symphony of opportunity and delight right here in this moment.