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Up Front/Commentary: Given the alternative, what's wrong with memory loss?

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By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune |

I read recently that baby boomers now fear memory loss more than cancer, heart disease or stroke.

Now what was I going to say about that ...?

Oh well. Anyway, it seems odd we boomers would fear memory loss more than dread disease. Dread disease involves misery and pain, which is not fun and can often lead to death, which is also not fun.

Memory loss - what's the big deal with that? So you forget the names of your children, your bank account password, where you set down your coffee cup just two seconds ago. Most of my friends and I have been dealing with that our entire adult lives and we've learned to cope by now.

Maybe what we really fear about memory loss is looking stupid in public, which can happen whenever you run into someone you've known for a long time and yet could not recall their name if someone was holding a gun to your head.

It also makes me feel stupid whenever I go someplace and forget where I parked my car. It especially makes me feel stupid if I've parked it right inside my own garage.

Sometimes our fear of looking stupid is reinforced by other people, such as when my computer goes on the fritz and I panic and call up my son at Starship Enterprise headquarters and ask him what to do. He always acts annoyed at this, which makes me annoyed at him, and especially when he says: "Mom, you're too stupid to run a computer. Why don't you just give it up and go bag groceries for a living?"

And then they wonder why you've forgotten their names the next time they come home.

There's a guy who's written a health book telling people how they can prevent mental decline and fight memory loss by taking a memory pill. The testimonials to this book are powerful, such as this one from Kasey L. of Olathe, Kan.: "I was having trouble finding words in my brain and remembering things. Now I am as sharp as a tack and I have a memory like an elephant." She might have added that her ability to turn a witty cliché has also been enhanced.

Deciding whether you're more afraid of life-threatening disease than memory loss is kind of like trying to select between one path that leads to death and destruction and the other to ruin and total despair. You hope you make the right choice. Frankly, whatever terrible things might happen to me in the rest of my life I'm hoping they will also be accompanied by memory loss. If I can't remember what happened it won't bother me so much.

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