SUMMER IS A MAGICAL TIME
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I was very sad to learn of the death of the actor Gene Wilder, or Jerome Silberman as his Bar Mitzvah certificate read 70 years ago.

Wilder lived to age 83. A lifetime and then some according to the Psalms that say the span of a person's life is 70 years. Thus at 83 he would have celebrated his second Bar Mitzvah this year. Sadly, Alzheimer's disease sapped him of his memory and his strength, and as many in this congregation know from experiences with their own loved one's his last years were not full of life or memory – but the slipping away of both.

I will always think of Gene Wilder as The Frisco Kid, "The Rabbi with no knife" as he was called by a native American as he literally endured a trial by fire to save the Torah.

For others it was Blazing Saddles or Young Frankenstein or The Producers, so many memorable roles. But perhaps the most iconic was of the smiling, childlike wonderment of Willy Wonka, which Wilder brought to life and to color for children of every age for the last 40 years.

I grew up watching Willy Wonka, the movie came out just after my first birthday – my 46th is this Monday and his death reminds us that the stories of our childhood retain a charm that nothing else can approach.

I have marvelled at watching my own children be mesmerized by dreams of the Golden Ticket and chocolate rivers and *umpaloopas* and lollipop trees. Their eyes wide with imagination of magical possibilities all curated by the greatest magician of them all Willy Wonka who sang to us of a world of 'Pure Imagination, a world of our own creation'

Rabbi David Wolpe, reflecting on the iconic role of Wonka wrote, "When we are older, we have dreams, but none of them gets close to the glow of the golden ticket. As adults, there are worlds we wish to be admitted to—back rooms or clubs, concerts or first-class seats—but they cannot compare to the yearning to step into the Wonka factory, the enchanted world behind the high gates."

Children who are lucky enough grow up in safety and security spend their childhood wanting to grow older, but what a world they inhabit in their youth! As George Bernard Shaw once wrote "Youth is the most precious thing in life; it is too bad it has to be wasted on children."

But, wasted or not, how lucky we all were to grow up with magical stories that possess a reservoir of wonder that lasts a lifetime. Children whose formative years were captured by Harry Potter, or in an earlier age by Narnia or Lord of the Rings. The Wizard of Oz or Roald Dahl's wild imagination, all have an imaginative treasury inside to last a lifetime.

We would be wise not to dismiss those childhood fantasies as merely childhood things.

Bruce Springsteen sang about them in his song Glory Days:

And I hope when I get old I don't sit around thinking about it
but I probably will
Yeah, just sitting back trying to recapture
a little of the glory of, well time slips away
and leaves you with nothing mister but
boring stories of glory days

Those memories are important; they may be boring to others but they are critical to each of us. The dreams of our youth become for many if not most the measure of our adult success.

What did you want to be when you grew up? What crazy Rube Goldberg invention did you sketch on the back of your note book that would make your bed, feed your dog, do your homework and brush your teeth? How did you imagine the stories that would be written about you as the hero of this or that great moment in history?

That was the world of Willy Wonka and the Wizard of Oz – and it was so important for each of us because it got us through the angst of being a child and a teenager. And for some those memories make being a grownup bearable.

There is a company in Texas that for $500 will let you go back to kindergarten for a day. With nap time and apple juice and crayons, and finger painting. They have a waiting list 4 months long.

We are firmly rooted in our adulthood, our mortgage, our job, our responsibilities keep us there, maybe for some imprison us there. But the magic of Wonka and Oz and Potter is that in our imaginations we can be children and free from all of that once again.

School starts for most children this this week, and with it the last days of summer fade into the dim grey of the familiar Vancouver sky that will itself obscure some of the magic of this beautiful place.

I have often thought that when summer comes we are all children once again, no matter our age. The magic of this time of year is that it returns all of us to seekers of The Golden Ticket and followers of the Yellow Brick Road.

Summer is a time for dreaming, endless possibilities, lazy days by the pool or long evenings that chase the sun as we sit with friends and tell stories of adventures.

Time stands still in summer. No longer measured by work weeks and school days, its elastic like the endless Taffy Puller in the Wonka Factory.

I hope that summer and its magic to return us to simpler times lasts for all of us even as the skies grow cold and grey and our summer tan lines fade and thanks to Gene Wilder and Netflix we can always return there on cold wet rainy days.

When my nieces and nephews were growing up and then my own children it would be a very special day when we would show them Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory for the first time. Their minds would be filled with dreams of a Golden Ticket and those dreams would linger long into adulthood. What a gift the ability to dream and imagine and fantasize is, we are never too old to follow the yellow brick road, we just grow to think we are.

Childhood and adulthood should be touched by magic wands and secret chocolates and Quidditch games. Summer fades and the world becomes sober soon enough once again.

God bless Gene Wilder and Harry Potter and Dorothy for giving us so much magic, and enabling our dreams.