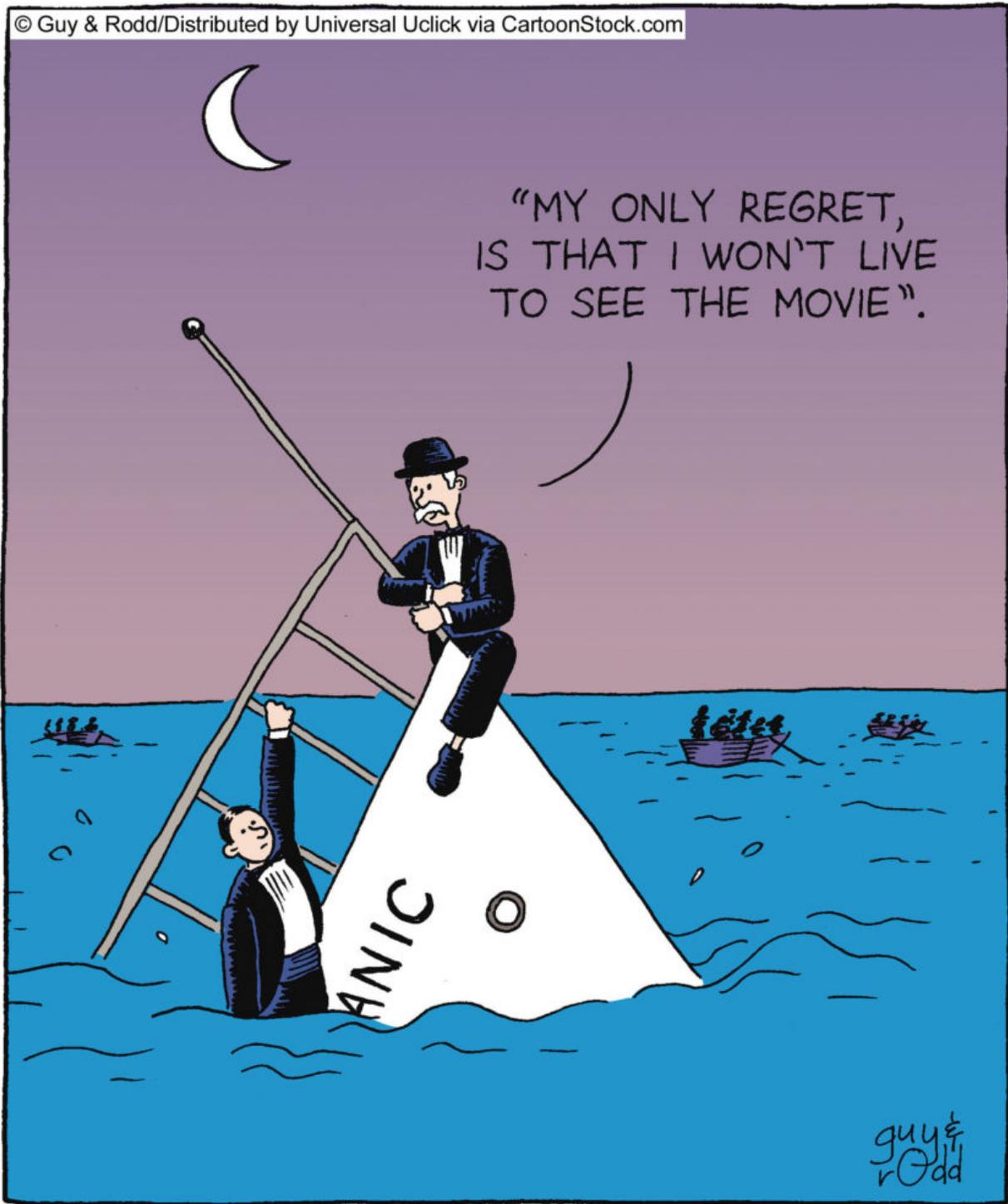# List your regrets

At the beginning of each new year we're encouraged to set goals for the coming year. I'm a big fan of that. It might also be beneficial to periodically list regrets: things we regret about the previous year and even regrets from the distant past that have come into focus.

Here's my truncated list of regrets from the past.

- Not learning a second language. In high school I studied Spanish for three years; to get my PhD I learned German, but neither language "took"; I viewed both pursuits as "got to" instead of "get to." My four-year-old grandson, Benjamin, attends a Spanish immersion school where only Spanish is spoken. I hope he keeps it up.
- All three of my college degrees are in music. I should have pursued a broader education.

- I didn't understand until later in life, the impact my dysfunctional family had on my life.
- I didn't understand the value of reading books until later in life. For the first 55 years of my life I only read books under compulsion. I didn't understand that "reading allows us the benefit and pleasure of thinking another person's thoughts" (Harris).
- I didn't drink wine until I was 40 years old. My conservative, Protestant upbringing taught that drinking wine is sin. It isn't. (I need to write a blog post on this topic.)
- I haven't loved my wife as I should.
- I didn't understand the joy and wonder of "prefer one another." For most of my life I have focused on me—my interests and well-being. Two thousand years ago the apostle Paul encouraged us to focus on others (Philippians 2:4). Adam Grant recently wrote a book on the topic—*Give and Take.*

…and the list goes on

Some regrets are fixed and the loss unrecoverable. Name them and learn from them, but then drop them—there's no value in crying over spilt milk. But most of our regrets can be minimized through change. In a wonderful, redemptive manner, naming a regret and then vowing to make things different, works. Of the seven regrets I listed above, none are immutable.

The word "regret" normally carries a negative, fatalistic meaning. Why not reimagine the term to mean "catalyst for course correction"?