

Making the most of cabin fever



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By Nate Smelle

Today is Groundhog Day. Like clockwork, this morning every Ontarian's favourite meteorologist - Wiarton Willie - emerged from his burrow to deliver us with its much anticipated seasonal weather report. Providing us with some good news for a change, according to Willie, we can expect an early spring. Although Groundhog Day does not provoke the massive wave of consumerism that rolls in every Christmas, when Willie steps from his den and does not see his shadow, this undersold holiday has the potential to inspire a much needed reminder of the friendly seasonal transformation to come.

Usually by this time of year the winter blahs have taken hold and many of us find ourselves yearning for the arrival of spring. Because the pandemic has forced us to spend much of the last year indoors and away from others, this year's strain of cabin fever is different from the kind we usually struggle with during the dark, short days of winter. Having arrived early - for a lot of folks with the announcement of the stay at home order and state of emergency in late December - it is more long-lasting and depressing. On the other side of the coin, having become somewhat accustomed to the solitude we have had to embrace in 2020, for me, the symptoms are far less severe.

From my perspective, if anything, COVID-19 has given humanity and the planet a chance to breathe in our reality and reflect on what we value most, what we can do better, why we do what we do, where we are going, what the world of our dreams looks like, and how we can make it so.

As I have previously mentioned in this column, this prolonged case of cabin fever we have been enduring and enjoying for more than 365 days now has given us the opportunity to contemplate our place in the world as an individual, as a family, as a community, and as a species. To engage in this opportunity for contemplation, I have been revisiting many of the books, documentaries, magazines, and notes I have collected since moving to L'Amable in 2006.

Taken aback by the magnitude of information under my nose yet out of sight - mostly hidden beneath the lids of plastic storage containers - at first I was intimidated by the task before me. However, since putting on my goggles and jumping into the endeavour headfirst, I now find it difficult to pull myself away from the exercise.

Fascinated by the enlightening nature of the research/early spring cleaning project, the process of de-cluttering has grown slower with each container I sort through. One might think the tedious nature of this ever-slowng chore could act as a deterrent from getting the work done, but for me that has not been the case. The more information I come across, the more my curiosity of what lies beneath the next lid grows.

In removing the lid from each container, my eyes grow wider along with my understanding of the knowledge and experiences that have shaped my understanding of the world we live in.

Obviously the internet holds an almost infinite abundance of knowledge that has the potential to open our minds with every click. But, in acting as a sort of time capsule, each container stowed away in our storage spaces paints a unique portrait of our personal history.

To our advantage, we all have the ability to search online for the specific information we need at any given moment.

Uncovering a gem from our past in a pile of papers however, has the potential to awaken us in a more direct and personal way.

For instance, upon opening another container on the weekend, I came across a bag of notebooks from when I was a student of philosophy at Brock University. Written in black ink on the cover of the notebook on the top of the stack were the words of the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Summing up the thoughts in my head at that exact moment, he wrote "The essence of the question is the opening up, and keeping open of possibilities.?"

Re-evaluating these words as I continued digging out this burrow of information, I found myself questioning what it is that compels some to explore possibilities, and others to embrace complacency with the status quo.