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BROCK'S BANTER: Life through a viewfinder

By Brock Weir

Do you ever get the feeling that you're missing out on a part of life?

I'd put money on the possibility you've probably experienced that feeling one way or another. It might come in the form of regret over a decision taken, or perhaps not taken. It might come from an opportunity which, in hindsight, has the patina of an opportunity squandered.

Maybe it was a project on which you didn't quite push your kids hard enough, or maybe pushed them too hard, leading them to duck under your arm into another direction; or a situation that would have turned out wholly differently if you had the ability to answer that age-old question, ?If I knew then, what I know now??

Okay, so we've probably all experienced one or a combination of these things but recently I have been wondering whether the elements of life I have been missing out on have been right in front of my eyes.

The cause? Right there in my left pocket.

I didn't quite understand it at the time.

It was 2007. I was in Rwanda on a journalism exchange through Carleton University with a group of approximately 12 of my fellow journalism students. Based in Kigali, we were fanned out through various media outlets in the developing country to carry out a variety of tasks during the weeks but the weekends were largely our own.

A popular activity for any groups of visitors to the country was trekking up the mountains to get up close and personal ? and a respectful distance ? with a rare population of gorillas. They were excursions taken by our groups in shifts, groups often leaving every week or two.

One day, around the midpoint of my internship, we saw off a group of three or four as they set off for the well-worn path up the mountain.

As each trip produced different results we encouraged everyone to take as many pictures as they could.

Most did, except for one of my female contemporaries.

She came back with just one or two shots in her camera.

Most of us were aghast and peppered her with questions. Although I can't remember the full barrage of questions she faced, they can perhaps be best summed up in a double-barrelled shot: ?This was a once in a lifetime opportunity? Are you crazy??

?I wanted to experience it,? she said calmly. ?I didn't want to just see it all through my camera.?

Most of us brushed this off as nonsense, but I'm starting to think she was ahead of her time ? well, ahead of our time.

The older I get, the closer I am coming around to her side, and this feeling has really come to a boil over the last few weeks.

There have been plenty of opportunities to drive this point home.

The Toronto International Film Festival was one such example which gave me pause.

Through the ticket system this year I was lucky enough to score tickets to some of the special premieres at which the stars, directors, writers, and some of the other cast and crew members would be in attendance. I was particularly excited to see individuals along the lines of Judi Dench, Helen Mirren and Donald Sutherland plug their latest flicks up on stage right before my very eyes.

The time came, of course, and so did the excitement. As it did, my iPhone came out, as I frantically thumbed my way to the Video option to capture it all for posterity. Mission accomplished. I had plenty of raw material to toss up online, but they were in short vignettes of maybe 20 ? 30 second intervals.

I could have gone whole hog and recorded the events in their entirety, but as I recorded I was surprised to find I was giving myself a mental dressing down.

?You're such an idiot!? I told myself in a tone that would have been more than caustic had I actually given voice to my words right then and there. ?You have these legends of stage and screen standing right there before your very eyes and you're watching them through your phone like some cheap, blurry YouTube video.?

You know, I had to admit I was right.

And yet, I didn't quite listen tto my own wise counsel.

The phone went down for a few minutes, my eyes took in what was actually before me, but I still felt the need to capture events here and there for posterity. I couldn't imagine hurrying back into my phone to watch it any time soon and yet the compulsion was there.

The same thing happened a few weeks later during the Invictus Games, albeit under slightly different circumstances. In this case, attending the Opening and Closing ceremonies, I had a particular request to do a Facebook live here and there for those who were

unable to attend ? or happened to be outside the country.
The same feeling washed over me. Here I was, immersed in an experience, but again looking at it through a phone.
This was lathered, rinsed and repeated in between the Opening and Closing ceremonies when covering the debut of York Region's fully accessible washroom trailer at Fort York during the archery finals. Again, it was thrilling to experience the competition and watch Prince Harry interact with athletes from around the Commonwealth and beyond with my very own eyes. And yet, I watched a good chunk of it through my viewfinder.
I suppose it is a hazard of the trade. As an editor and reporter it is my job to be at any number of events a Town like Aurora can throw at you, whether it is taking a picture of men, women, girls and boys initiating a particularly exciting project, getting that perfect shot at a ribbon cutting, or that candid moment that sums up some otherwise intangible display of human emotion.
Case in point: Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars Aurora-Newmarket on Thursday night.
Dancers from across both municipalities were giving it their all on the dance floor, busting particularly ambitious ? and achieved ? moves that they probably thought otherwise impossible at the start of the summer just passed, but what a show they put on!
That is, I just wished I could have experienced it further.
With different coloured lights piercing the air to lend the event a certain ambiance, coupled with fog machines doing their job from all corners of the room, imparting a dramatic atmosphere for the dancers, they came together to provide a difficult challenge for this particular photographer. And, it was a problem conquered only by two particular camera settings and snapping away continuously during a performance.
In the end, I captured everything , but, in another respect I missed so much. Judging by the other phones craned upward trying to do the same for their own favourite dancer, I certainly was not alone, but it gave me pause.
How much of life are we actually experiencing with our own eyes, and how much are we actually merely ?experiencing? through a viewfinder? In this day and age where smartphones and other technology are becoming increasingly ubiquitous is this simply the new status quo, or do we need to reclaim our own reality?