

BROCK'S BANTER: It bears repeating

By Brock Weir

2018 is here.

You're either holding steadfast to your resolutions, long-standing since the start of 2017, or made in haste as the hours ticked down on Sunday night. Heck, maybe your resolutions are already out the window and you've set a more feasible target for 2019.

However you celebrated your New Year's, I hope it signals the start of a healthy and happy year ahead.

In the lead-up to the holiday season, I unusually had two requests to rerun a column that was received with almost universal positivity last year. Also unusually, both requests came from almost the exact same demographic: parents of young adults who had come home for the season, fresh from their first years at university or college and, instead of using the time to reconnect with their family, used the time glued to the screen to reconnect with friends who were also returning home.

It would, they said, be a good parting gift for their kids as they go back to student life and although it might be too late for them to get a hard copy at home, I am only too happy to help these parents wherever I can.

So here, slightly revised from originally published on October 12, is ?Life through a viewfinder.?

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 to 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.

As an editor and reporter it is my job to be at any number of events, whether it is taking a picture of a particularly exciting project, getting that perfect shot at a ribbon cutting, or a candid moment that captures human emotion. And yet, in trying to secure those shots, you remove yourself from a real experience.

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?