

Word of the Day: Achie?

Brock's Banter

By Brock Weir

What's that old joke about one of Canadians' favourite past-times being forming an orderly line?

Perhaps it's not the best idea to look too deep into the quip, as it is that rare combo of being both age-old and threadbare. But there is always a kernel of truth in there somewhere.

Given the age we're living in where we're all sick and tired of standing in line, whether to get our all-important vaccines, to land a place inside a grocery store that has already reached its capacity, or to do what we can to support local commerce, maybe this isn't the most opportune moment to bring up the subject of queueing, yet here we are.

Before the arrival of COVID, the general idea was we didn't really care what the line-up was for, but when you saw people waiting for their turn at bat for whatever it is, there's the recognition of a common cause, and, for whatever reason, we don't want to get left out.

Ah, maybe that's the origin of ?FOMO? (Feeling of Missing Out).

No matter our age, we all experience something like that, probably at intervals we would prefer not to admit.

I, for one, remember heading into Sears one day with my mom when I was in Grade 7 or so, intent on finding a Beanie Baby. You might ask why, and it's a fair question. I still don't have the answers. The craze was sweeping my school and despite my near complete lack of interest in collecting them, trading them, or whatever else people did with them (I really didn't care to find out) I was damned if I was going to miss out on having one.

In retrospect, I am sure this innate desire to go with the flow was recognized by my mother, who steered me towards some more economical alternative ?tribute? brands to Ty, but the bulldog and cow I left the store with seemed to do the trick ? at least for a while.

I withstood ? and avoided ? the Tamagotchi turmoil, the Furby frenzy, the Tickle Me Elmo ecstasy, and the P.O.G. pandemonium, but there I was, clamoring for a piece of fabric with beads stuck up its backside out of sheer principle.

We all have those little inconsequential things we latch on to.

A few years ago, the Pokemon Go craze had many people rolling their eyes, claiming it a huge waste of time for participants out in the community running around for the hunt while, in the same breath, criticizing the same group of people for lazing around and doing nothing. And, after a lull of a few years, Pokemon Go experienced a minor resurgence when COVID-19 limited our options.

Now, the green and grey grids that have become synonymous with Wordle are becoming inescapable on social media.

For the uninitiated, Wordle is a web-based game, typically one puzzle per day, that gives player six chances to guess a word. With each guess, you're told which letters you've guessed correctly in the right place, when you've picked a letter in the wrong place that is within the word, and letters that are complete misses. It's thought to be enough information to get you through by six guesses and, once you've cracked it, you can post your results to social media for bragging rights.

That's it. Self-satisfaction, brain exercise, and social media bragging rights.

While I'll admit the game is a good way to get the noggin running in the morning I haven't yet felt compelled to post my results to any social media channel and had a hard time understanding why people were so eager to do the same.

That is until I read an article that placed the game in a wider perspective.

“That Wordle takes minutes is a point of pleasure,” wrote Molly Roberts in an editorial for The Washington Post on January 13. “Yet you emerge all the same feeling you have done something, when the menu of things to do has truncated thanks to restaurant closures, or cancelled flights, or a mismatch in risk tolerance among friends and family,

“That is really what makes Wordle perfect for a weary populace: We're playing together, but we're also playing alone.” Togetherness in solitude is what we've been after throughout this crisis – what we're looking for in our video calls or group chats, our remote cookbook clubs and our viral debates over the latest miniseries or movie we watched, not because it looked good, but because everyone else was watching. Wordle allows us to win a bit of that togetherness every day. Which hopefully brings our lonely hearts a bit of peace.”

It is indeed the feeling that we've accomplished something in a time where that feeling of accomplishment can feel elusive, even when we're unconsciously probably doing more now than ever before – and, yes, although it seems ingrained in us to say otherwise, self-care is among the things we all have to do right now. It is indeed that feeling of accomplishing something together. But I also think part of the appeal is with just one puzzle per day, there's something concrete to anticipate and look forward to each day.

In this time when, after the light at the end of the tunnel got so close, most everything seems like just a little bit more of a struggle than it once was, particularly in our bleak winter months, it is more important than ever before to have something to eagerly anticipate.

Getting all of this behind us – and we know without further explanation what “all of this” is – is obviously the most important and overwhelming thing we're collectively anticipating and looking forward to; but really taking stock and making a full evaluation of all the things, however small or minute they might seem, is an invaluable exercise.

They're the things that propel us forward, that make us look forward to the next day, week, or month in front of us, and that give us that important feeling of accomplishment.

Whatever those sources of motivation might be, let's celebrate that and keep the momentum going. If we're all energized and galvanized in ways that are fulfilling, we will have the wherewithal to get through to the other side in this long struggle we're all in.