

Creature Comforts (and Discomforts)

by BROCK WEIR

A couple of weekends ago, I made the mistake of dressing for typical May weather.

Setting out that Saturday, I thought nothing of wearing a short-sleeved button-up ? after all, spring was allegedly in full swing.

It was an early start, so when I made my sartorial selection, I figured it would warm significantly once the sun came out to play and felt confident leaving the house with my selection, with a cardigan just in case.

Except, amid the flurry that resulted from nearly forgetting my camera before setting out, the cardigan didn't join me for the complete journey. The sun, as it happened, didn't join me, either, so there I sat in an outdoor tent in single-digit degrees, in short sleeves, waiting for a military parade to begin as I daydreamed diving into a large swimming pool of warm tea to get full feeling back into my limbs.

Needless to say, I didn't quite feel my best the next day and whether or not it was psychosomatic, I felt a little bit fluish and went back to bed midday for a nap. Sleep, apparently, wasn't in the offing, so after about an hour of staring at the ceiling hoping to bore myself into slumber, I popped in a DVD of a favourite TV show and not only did I feel almost instantly better, I was lulled into a bit of a nap soon enough.

It was, to me, a prime example of just how nice it is to have a ?comfort show? in your life.

A comfort show is generally described as a piece of entertainment one can turn to for solace, joy, or, as the name suggests, simple comfort ? and that's nothing to sneeze at.

Some criticize such things as an escape hatch that keeps you from dealing with important, challenging things in life, but that's not always the case.

There's nothing wrong with having a warm blanket to envelope you when it's needed, even if it's about as far removed from a quilt or duvet as you can possibly be. And I'd wager we all have just such a blanket in one way or another, whether we realize it or not ? a favourite book, a favourite film, a favourite television show, a favourite nature walk, sport, or drive.

As beneficial as these outlets can be, it's important to remember that seeking comfort doesn't necessarily mean being complacent to whatever is causing you to seek it in the first place.

That said, however, some can seek comfort with a bit too much zeal.

On Thursday, I had the pleasure of attending a screening of *Walking Through the Fire*, a remarkable ?visual album? led by the Sultans of String, in collaboration with Indigenous musicians, artists and storytellers, created in response to one of the 94 Calls to Action outlined by the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation ten years ago.

The ?visual album,? which can be described as a collection of evocative music videos, each woven into the last through a very strong narrative, touched upon a several difficult subjects, and was followed by a question-and-answer session with three of the participating artists ? Shannon Thunderbird, Kate Dickson, and Chris McKhool, the latter of whom led the project

Their words were uniformly insightful, but one of Dickson's comments struck a particular chord with me.

On the subject of each individual's perception, she shared: ?You tap into an ancient brain going back generations and generations.

We've all done it. You realize that you're allowed to feel what you feel. You know, there's that old phrase, 'Knowing sets you free.' I'm not so sure how it sets you free. However, you have to know about just about everything, no matter how awful it might be, no matter how unpleasant it makes you feel, because being unsettled spurs you to action.

Dickson might have been speaking about the very difficult and harrowing experiences of our Indigenous peoples, experiences that many of us of non-Indigenous descent can't begin to fully understand, but I feel the sentiments she expressed are universal.

One of my favourite comfort shows, *Bewitched*, has an episode where the neighbours, mostly concerned mothers, are hand-wringing about the impending closure of their kids' favourite park; a prevailing sentiment amongst the general population ? at least until a few nose-twitches got involved ? was, 'you can't fight city hall!'

Thankfully, in my experience, this sentiment has largely faded into the ether as residents of our communities rarely shy away from filling Council Chambers to fight for the issues close to their hearts. In other areas, however, the quest for action quite often takes a hit in the quest for comfort.

Books that have educated, informed, and indeed entertained readers for generations, and have had profound impacts on the way we've thought and seen the world for decades, are being tossed aside after a chapter or two ? or, worse, being left on the shelf altogether ? because they're products of their time and some of the sentiments contained within their covers can make some readers feel 'uncomfortable' through modern sensibilities.

If it makes you think about where we are today, versus the time in which it was written, it sounds to me like the book is still doing exactly as it was intended to do.

Films continue to experience a similar phenomenon.

A couple of years ago, a friend of mine set a challenge for himself to watch every single film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture since Oscar's inception in 1929. Things were going great until they got to 1939 and that year's winner, *Gone with The Wind*, and its highly romanticized view of the American south before, during, and immediately after their Civil War. I'm not sure what they were expecting given the fact it's one of the most famous and widely-seen movies of all time, and its themes have been widely known (and criticized) for more than 80 years, but that was the end of achieving a clean Best Picture sweep ? all in the name of 'discomfort.'

To my mind, rather than discomfort, it was an opportunity for a critical viewing that was ultimately lost. Alas. We're living in an increasingly challenging and divided world, and, inevitably, this is reflected in our news and current affairs, no matter where you happen to tap into them. If you happen to tap into them at all.

There are no shortage of things happening right now at home and abroad that can be disheartening, discomforting, and perhaps overwhelming. You might feel a desire to close the paper, turn off the TV news, close your apps, and power down your devices, to wrap yourself in the warm metaphorical blanket of your choice, but knowledge, if not fully emancipating, is power indeed.

And who knows? Armed with knowledge, and the example of others, you could too be inspired to make a difference ? if only you give yourself a chance.

It would be easier with a nose twitch, of course, but we can all make due with what's inside all of us.