

Ego trips down memory lane

By Brock Weir

How are you capturing your precious moments these days?

I was thinking this over last week after interviewing a person about a new initiative called Show & Tell for Grown Ups. As the name suggests, this is a program where adults are asked to dust off the skills they acquired at elementary school and bring to the virtual table an object ? or anything, really ? that is important to you and/or tells a story.

Going into the interview, I had a preconceived idea that an object that might be most appropriate for Show & Tell was something handed down from generation to generation or a painting or sculpture that best represents a creative muscle flex. Or even some mystery item you have around the house, the use of which has been lost to the sands of time and you have a faint glimmer of hope someone, somewhere, maybe even someone on your Zoom rogues' gallery might have a clue as to its use?and whether you can actually get rid of it without needing it down the road!

One example which caught me off-guard was the suggestion a photograph might do the trick. It wasn't the idea of a photograph itself that caught me off-guard; rather it was the realization I simply couldn't remember the last time I had printed off a shot or taken it in for a professional job.

Over the years, I have amassed thousands of photos, starting from when I was a pee-wee shutterbug capturing the most mundane aspects of my life ? and if you flip through any of these early albums you can see an eye for a good shot take shape. Lest you think I'm trying to inflate my ego, let me just say that this progression extended from my first trip with a camera to the Metro Toronto Zoo where I somehow managed to capture solely the legs of the animals I was trying to immortalize to?.you know? finally getting a giraffe dead-centre a year or two later.

It's the little things? but I digress.

These little tangible nuggets of memory caught my imagination as a youngster as my family kept very meticulous photo albums. At the age of five or so, I was fascinated by the snapshots I appeared in at family occasions I had little to no memory of. As such, I trotted these albums out at subsequent gatherings until everyone was well and truly sick of them.

They ? particularly my slightly older cousins ? thought the whole process particularly tedious, but what they didn't realize, and what I didn't realize at the time was I was simply trying to fill in the blanks left by memories that were made too early to stick.

The conversation on Show & Tell for Grown Ups may have inspired a summer project of combing through photos I have taken digitally in recent years and mapping out a new album for posterity ? if only for my own satisfaction.

On that subject, one aspect of physical media I don't particularly miss is the slide carousel, a medium that is akin to photo albums on Facebook or multi-posts on Instagram. Don't get me wrong, share images to your heart's content, but the reality is being forced to scroll past hundreds of photos of how friends spent their summer vacation is probably as tedious as my cousins found my faux-reminiscing. But not quite as tedious as the good ole days when going to a dinner party almost inevitably entailed being strong-armed into sitting through a slide show of somebody else's extravagant trip to an exotic locale which, as it happened, you were not invited on.

Forget Meryl Streep, the mark of a truly great actor may have been making it through experiences like those with a natural-looking smile on your face. But, again, I digress?

Which brings me to the private new ?space race? by members of the Billionaires Club who, in recent weeks, have been shelling

untold amounts of money to be blasted into space for a few minutes.

The first one to blast off received coverage that came and went, but the most recent example was almost breathless, thus bringing back those feelings of sitting through slides of someone else's vacation, a destination project I didn't really have any interest in.

What else could it be at this point other than a vanity project heard around the world?

The innovation of these jaunts, as well as the one coming up with Elon Musk, was on the backs of scientists and engineers, who got the short end of the stick in most coverage and conversations. Taking most of the glory were the men who poured out pieces of their fortunes to essentially dip a big toe into space like it was a pool of questionable temperature.

And, as the world burns with wildfires and virus, watching billionaires drop more money than most of us can ever dream of just to get a reprieve from rather than help the planet for 20-odd minutes, was just adding insult to injury.

As breathless as the coverage was of the face of the mission, who got comfortable in the passenger seat while experts on the ground did the driving, there was, however, one element that was worthy in my book of sitting up and taking notice: the presence of 82-year-old Wally Funk, who aspired to be the first American female NASA on board.

Per The Washington Post: "By the time Funk endured those circumstances (in an isolation tank) for 10 hours and 35 minutes in 1961, she had already taken at least 87 other exams, ranging from swallowing three feet of rubber hose to guzzling a pint of radioactive water. It was all in the service of becoming one of the first female astronauts at a time when American women still needed their husbands' permission to sign a mortgage and get a credit card.

"Within months, Funk's dream was squelched. NASA had no program for female astronauts, she learned in a perfunctory telegram. Without that federal support, her privately funded testing would end.

"I've been waiting a long time to finally get up there, and I've done a lot of astronaut training through the world - Russia, America - and I could always beat the guys on what they were doing because I was always stronger," Funk said. "I want to go again, fast!"

I would like her to go again, fast, too, and have her accomplishments given the spotlight they deserve.

Until then, I would welcome the opportunity to hear more about her experiences and what she had to endure, even if it is in the form of a dreaded slide presentation!

Her trips, not ego trips, are the stories worth telling and, in turn, preserving.