

Fear of Missing Out on Milestones

Brock's Banter

By **BROCK WEIR**

When all this is said and done, what are we going to have to show for it?

The popular Broadway musical *Rent* offers a few suggestions beyond ?525,600 minutes?:

In daylights, in sunsets, in midnights and cups of coffee

In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife

By the start of this week, we were zeroing in at around 560,000 minutes since the start of the pandemic and we have had plenty sunsets, midnights, cups of coffee, and bursts of daylight-past. Hopefully we've had plenty of laughter in our self-imposed exiles, but if you're counting the inches and miles of your home, faced with a dearth of things to do, the pandemic just might be getting the better of you.

When we started out, we were brimming over with ideas on how to keep busy and, of course, in this age of social media, mark them for posterity.

In an effort to show we were all in this together, we solicited images from our leaders ? elected officials and community builders alike ? to see how they were spending the first few weeks of the first of three-and-counting lockdowns.

Their images were probably not dissimilar to what you probably shared with your own friends and family: showing off some of the cool and sometimes kitschy features of home offices, newly-found places to walk dogs, flexing some atrophied culinary muscles, and the list goes on.

While I wasn't part of the seemingly endless parade of people sharing pictures of their sourdough starters and the resulting loaves and rolls of varying quality, I did what I could. For better or worse. The fun of taking to Facebook to vent my spleen on various missteps made by contestants on *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* wore off quickly, so I challenged myself to trim my beard down almost to the skin to see just how far I could grow it before we were allowed to get haircuts again.

The fun ? and the interest ? quickly waned too as I got closer and closer to blending into ZZ Top but thankfully the first wave flattened before things got too out of hand.

And not a moment too soon. The inter-wave weeks brought a new trend: photo streams of people first cautiously peeking their eyes out from their doors attempting some activities that reminded them of normalcy and, once case counts well and truly started to wain by the middle of summer, a barrage of photos of business as usual?

And, as that trend continued into the second wave, we of course had to hunker down once again. Too much business as usual in unusual circumstances.

Chalk it up to the winter, but the inter-wave weeks between Wave 2 and Wave 3 didn't seem to bring as much rejoicing. We were ? and are ? sick and tired of what we're slogging through and documenting it didn't appear to be top of mind. Accentuating the positive was practically replaced by wallowing in the negative and complaining about what we couldn't do.

But now, in the middle of a third wave, we're seeing another trend emerge: the vaccination selfie.

As a guy in his mid-30s living in an area not yet designated as a hot spot, I have seen photos of our community leaders, once eligible, lining up for their AstraZeneca, of my parents with Pfizer-loaded needles in their arms, and some of my closest friends in the United States receiving a few drops of the bounty of vaccine options at hand, with their doses miraculously accessible at pop-up clinics at the ends of their residential streets.

Am I jealous? Frustrated, perhaps, but jealousy is futile. Instead, I am rejoicing in the fact that each needle in an arm, whether in the United States or Canada, is an all-important building block in getting back to some degree of normalcy.

However, this stance is not the only game in town.

A lot has been written recently about vaccine 'FOMO' that is, 'fear of missing out.'

In a think piece earlier this month in the New York Times entitled 'The 'Joy and Envy' of Seeing All Your Friends Get Vaccinated', authors Jenny Gross and Jesus Jimenez gave us a snapshot of the Canadian experience:

'The end of the pandemic also feels far away in the Canadian province of Ontario,' they wrote. 'Massimo Cubello, a 28-year-old who lives in Toronto, said he is happy for his vaccinated friends in the United States and Britain, but his Zoom fatigue is setting in, and driveway visits with members of his family have not been that easy because of the cold weather.'

'It's good to see people getting vaccinated because that's all part of the process of getting to where we need to get to, but it definitely does make you a little bit envious and anxious about where we, as Canadians, are going to be able to experience that ourselves.'

In the weeks since Gross and Jimenez published their piece, the anxiety referenced by Cubello is emerging ever-stronger.

Could the deluge of selfies and photos of jabs in progress be causing undue stress and anxiety for people who are, for one reason or another, unable to get their jabs in a timely manner?

'Not going to contribute to vaccine FOMO by posting a selfie,' wrote a lawyer friend recently, just one of many friends who have considered how such images have contributed to another health crisis which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic: mental health.

An alternate take, however, was offered by Patrick J. McGinnis in Business Insider.

'Fast forward to the summer of 2021. Imagine your friends and family sitting maskless at an indoor restaurant. They are laughing and hugging and living life like it's 2019 because they have had the vaccine. You, however, are attending virtually, via Zoom, because you do not. You sit at home with your Netflix and your sourdough, as you have for the last 18 months. If that image doesn't give you vaccine FOMO nothing will.'

'Before long, the skeptics and holdouts will realize that they are now part of an increasingly isolated minority. They will also inhabit that nightmare scenario of living life on Zoom while the rest of the world is returning to normal. As the pressure becomes unbearable, they will accept that their FOMO is stronger than their resolve. They will log out of Netflix, throw out their sourdough and roll-up a sleeve.'

'While not everyone will give in some people are impervious it won't take too many converts to neutralize COVID-19 once and when that happens, spare a thought for FOMO. When it comes to ending the pandemic, FOMO is no luxury good. It might be the most powerful weapon we have to achieve herd immunity.'

Of course, McGinnis writes from the perspective of a United States resident where vaccines are, by comparison, flowing like wine compared to our situation.

Our mounting frustration might make the FOMO situation a little more complex, but each photo is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. Knowing that all of our turns will eventually come, keep 'em coming. Personally, I'd rather look of a shot of a shot than a mullet.