

Get a hobby, already!

by Brock Weir

Did you ever hear the phrase, "Get a hobby!" directed at you when you were young?

Heck, have you ever had the phrase, "Get a hobby!" directed at you at any age?

In my experience, whether I've been on the receiving end of it, or simply within earshot of someone else getting summarily dismissed, it almost invariably comes with a side of derision.

The joke's on them, however, because it's a pretty damn sound piece of advice - particularly if you truly don't have one already. But who, when you get down to it, is truly hobby-free?

I grew up in an environment where hobbies abounded. But it was also, in some instances, an environment that had very strict definitions of what constituted a hobby.

Judging by what he left behind, my maternal grandfather had a passion for coin collecting. Being a numismatist might not have been how he defined himself, and it may have been a more passive hobby when you really got down to it, but it was there. He and his wife also shared a passion for golf, one which, along with bridge, stuck with her until the final few chapters of her life.

On the other side of the family tree, my paternal grandmother had a passion for pottery-making, curling and speed skating and, perhaps incongruously due to her diminutive size, muscle cars! Go figure. Her husband took somewhat more traditional rides on his hobby horse - photography, stamp collecting, and model railroading. Photography was something he passed down to my father, along with, to a lesser degree, model railroading. Philately was also one that was passed down, reaching my father and, intermittently, me as well, but I feel I may have been a familial outlier.

My hobbies were, and, in some cases, more passive - inclined more towards books, history, and classic film and television, and deep-dive research into many topics that fall under those umbrellas.

"Get a hobby!" I heard more than once.

Again, joke's on them - hobbies are in the eye of the beholder and, as far as I was (and am) concerned, my proverbial cup runneth over.

I've had a few hobbies come and go over the years, but the three listed above are at my core and aren't likely to go anywhere soon - and I'm fine with that.

The point is, they're there and, whatever your hobbies might be, we're all reaping the benefits.

This past spring, UCLA Health looked at the impact hobbies have on our minds, bodies, and souls. I was heartened that they too defined "hobby" as "any activity you do for pleasure during your leisure time" whether they "spark your imagination or creativity, get you moving or help you relax."

"The more hobbies you have, the greater the health benefit can be," they found. "Researchers have identified more than 600 ways that leisure activities might affect human health. However, health responses vary by person, hobby, and whether the activity is completed individually or in a group. Some benefits are immediate, and others may be seen over time. More research is needed to understand the full power of hobbies, but most experts agree that most hobbies can be good for your health."

The health benefits? Mental wellbeing, improved cognitive function, and even a reduction in one's risk of chronic disease.

?Some hobbies seem to offer greater benefits for mental health than others,? the report continued. ?A 2023 poll conducted by the American Psychiatric Association found that 71 per cent of the participants reporting ?very good' or ?excellent' mental health engage in creative activities more frequently than those reporting ?good', ?fair', or ?poor' mental health. If that creative hobby involves art, research suggests that doing it for two or more hours weekly yields the most benefit for well-being.

?Researchers suggest that taking up a hobby in your leisure time can support the biological processes of your endocrine, immune, and central nervous systems. When your body's systems are functioning well, it may lower your risk for health issues such as heart disease, stroke, dementia, and some types of cancer. Having hobbies ? especially those that reduce stress or get one moving ? may also affect your cardiometabolic health, which involves your heart, blood, and blood vessels. In particular, making art helps reduce cortisol (stress hormone), which is linked to lower blood pressure levels and heart rate.?

Get a hobby, indeed.

The report also found that hobbies that are mentally stimulating or involve physical activity are associated with a decreased risk of dementia in the 65+ population, a statistic that struck a particular chord with me on Sunday evening when I attending a screening of GTA filmmaker Sean Cisterna's new documentary Silver Screammers.

The doc charts Cisterna as he recruited area seniors, many of whom hail from York Region, including The Auroran's own Diane Buchanan, to get out of their comfort zones and take on behind-the-scenes production roles as Cisterna simultaneously filmed his short horror film, The Rug, starring Canadian entertainment icon Jayne Eastwood, a senior herself.

I had the pleasure of taking in one of The Rug's production days at Hillary House National Historic Site last year and it was amazing to see so many seniors not only learn filmmaking skills, a path many of them probably couldn't even imagine a couple of years ago. Not only did they execute their behind-the-scenes tasks capably but with an interest and passion that has clearly stuck with them since the production wrapped in 2024.

Will these newly-minted filmmakers, whose ages span from their mid-70s to just shy of 98, be the next senior directing sensation like 95-year-old Clint Eastwood or a critical acting darling like 96-year-old June Squibb, who, after decades in the business, scored her first leading film role just last year in Thelma, is currently starring in Scarlett Johansson's directorial debut, and now preparing to take over Broadway?

Maybe, maybe not, but it was clear at Sunday night's post-film Question-and-Answer session that their minds are open to the idea ? and, probably, just about any idea Cisterna might send their way.

And that, in the end, is the most important thing: keeping your mind open to the possibilities.

My contribution to the film, a brief on-camera interview with Cisterna, did not awaken any further desire in me to appear larger than life on the silver screen ? my apologies to the filmmaker ? but Sunday's screening satisfied my love of consuming film, and I left the theatre both engaged and energized.

Another win on the hobby front.

The passion the seniors had for their newfound hobbies, not to mention the pride in their newfound skills, was nothing short of inspiring and now I feel compelled to add to my aforementioned list of hobbies.

Time to try something new ? maybe it's time to try out snowshoeing, a hobby I intended to take up during the first winter of COVID before life got in the way.

Thankfully those days are behind us, but the snow certainly isn't ? let's see what we can make of it!