

## How personal are ?personal decisions? these days?

**By Brock Weir**

Do you ever look back and try to pinpoint a single moment or decision that grabbed your life and took it in an unexpected and worthwhile direction?

For me, a simple coffee table book my grandmother kept on a table beside a chair in her bedroom, sparked something. Leafing through the tome every time we visited only served to stoke these early sparks into a flame and the fire has barely subsided. I never truly outgrew this particular interest and as I got older, my research into what captured my attention only went deeper. It helped me find an outlet for this passion, one of advocacy on my own time which continues to stand me in good stead to this day.

Another instance is a decision made on my behalf, shortly after I was born.

One of the very first television programs I was ever exposed to sparked another enduring passion. It is through this interest, which has only gone from strength to strength in each passing year, that I met so many of my closest friends. It also served as a springboard for so many other interests that I can't imagine what my life would be like without my mother setting me in that very specific direction.

But the choice to fuel the passion, and everything that goes with it, over the last 35-odd years has been mine.

In my youth, there was one instance where I almost drove a teacher to distraction, but I maintain it was all for the greater good. The teacher, who hailed from South Africa, was involved in coordinating a small part of then-South African President Nelson Mandela's official trip to Canada in the late 1990s.

As such, he managed to get a handful of tickets to one gathering for his students and I was damned if I was going to miss such a historic event. It wasn't, of course, a ticket that was going to be handed out to anyone who asked. Certain projects were devised to essentially weed out, for lack of a better phrase, those who were truly interested in being a part of something historic or those just looking to get the afternoon off.

Those of us in the former category decided the work was worth it and that unforgettable afternoon in the presence of greatness ? however far away that greatness turned out to be on the day in question ? proved us right.

It was to be just over a decade before I was able to set foot in Africa, albeit significantly further north than the nation over which Mandela presided. In my last year of university, I had the chance to take part in the Rwanda Initiative, a partnership between Carleton University's School of Journalism, the Government of Canada, and several media outlets in the cities of Kigali and Butare.

The benefits of working abroad were obvious to me, but less so to several loved ones who didn't quite see the value, even for a very short period of time. Despite this, I made the decision to forge ahead, equipped with solid knowledge of the benefits and risks.

As far as decisions go, these are ultimately very personal ones. They were made with eyes wide open and with due consideration of what it would mean to me and those around me.

Try as I might, however, I simply can't see the choice to forego a vaccine of COVID-19 as a ?very personal decision? unless it is one made in consideration of your own medical history and in consultation with a qualified medical doctor.

Before embarking on that trip to Rwanda, I ? along with everyone else going there ? was turned into a veritable pin cushion as we were vaccinated against all manner of dreadful-sounding maladies and had oral inoculations when a simple jab wouldn't do the trick.

We took them not only to stay healthy while we were there, but also in due consideration of what we might bring into the country, or back to Canada where such health issues are mercifully rare ? funnily enough thanks to thorough medical research ? and to our families and other loved ones.

There was no question at the time that it was the right decision to make, but, then again, mass misinformation campaigns in 2007 were, by comparison to today, pretty embryonic.

There is no such thing in a Global Pandemic as a ?very personal decision? when it comes to vaccines.

Most of us have done our part by getting at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, putting our trust in medical science over questionable YouTube ?experts? and people on social media posting videos ?the experts don't want you to see? ? more often than not, it seems, recorded from the driver's seats of their cars and audio courtesy of a can and a string taped to the microphone of their cell.

In the fight against a still-invisible enemy that has wrought very visible havoc on our families, our health care system, our neighbourhoods and our businesses, every decision we make as individuals has very real consequences well beyond our bubbles.

Those who have been responsible in getting their double jabs have done so not only to protect their health and the health of those around them, but as citizens of a greater community, one that is collectively looking to get back to some degree of normalcy as soon as we possibly can and protect our most vulnerable from the Delta variant and others that are inevitably to come.

Those who haven't, if they are indeed able to do so, have also made a conscious choice, but it is certainly not a personal one as it has a direct impact on anyone who crosses their path. It is a choice to put little value on the health, safety and lives of loved ones, neighbours and any stranger you might meet through the course of the day. It's a choice to potentially get others sick, possibly very seriously, because it is somehow inconvenient to walk in off the street to get a shot.

It's a choice to disregard the work our frontline workers ? medical and otherwise ? have been doing tirelessly for more than a year-and-a-half simply because?well, the reasons presented baffle me, so let's just say ?to make a point.?

And it is a ?personal decision? the rest of us will be left on the hook for in one way or another.

Making difficult decisions is a very important rite of passage for each and every one of us. Some of them are very personal, others not so much, but each decision has a consequence whether immediately or somewhere down the line.

Consider what is well and truly a ?personal decision? and make sure you don't regret your choice.