

Let's get physical ? again

by BROCK WEIR

Height has never been an advantage I had in life.

It seemed promising at first ? for a good long while, I was taller than most of my peers. And then I plateaued.

Therefore, I know and appreciate just how frustrating it is to have something ? anything ? just out of reach.

Even if it's metaphorical.

One of my frustrations in the just-out-of-reach department might just be the memories and mementos that are just beyond our fingertips and are never likely to be at them again due to technological innovation and consequent obsolescence.

I was thinking about this a few times over the last week, first as the Town of Aurora prepared for its annual Community Garage Sale this past weekend. While I'm a dyed-in-the-wool garage sale fan, I couldn't help but think how disappointed people might be if all they found was a sea of fax machines, VCRs, 300-pound television sets, and mile-high stacks of discarded printers bought solely on the idea that a whole new unit was cheaper than buying new ink cartridges.

Thankfully, this turned out not to be the case, but my train of thought was double-tracked. As the garage sale day approached, as did our near-annual trip to the Found Footage Festival, a celebration of all the weird and wonderful things that can be found on long-forgotten VHS tapes, I was chatting with a friend at another event, and while waiting for the main attraction to start, discussions turned to VCRs. No, really.

He had a number of VHS tapes from the late 1990s that were very important to him but, now VCR-less, had no way of accessing these memories that were so close at hand. I sympathized. A few years ago, I had to discard what seemed like hundreds of tapes of my own. One of the few I saved was a nearly 40-year-old video of a family Christmas that, thankfully, was still fit for digitization. He wasn't so sure this would be the case with his, but still plans on getting them professionally digitized.

Then again, as most of us know, tape degrades. Even if a service can be found to do the job right, it's no guarantee that the job can be done at all.

Here in our own archives, we've found recently that some of the CD-ROMs and the DVD-Rs of yore could no longer be read on the appropriate devices we still have. Thankfully, the vast majority was eventually accessed but the slightly alarming experience both reminded and underscored how ephemeral our digital world can be, no matter the equipment.

Whether it's a corrupted file, malicious access, or simply environmental degradation, what we save in the digital realm can be lost in the blink of an eye. Similarly, it seems that people are also realizing that what we purchase in the digital realm can also be gone in a similar blink or at the whim of the provider, no matter how much we pay.

Last week, the TV comedy Hacks ended its five-season run and, in the lead-up to the season finale, [deadline.com](#) reported the show's creators were pushing for a full-on DVD/Blu-ray release of the show, bucking the recent trend away from physical media release in favour of streaming outlets.

'It's such an important time for people to invest in physical media because things are coming down all the time and it's like, 'Oh, I love that movie, I want to see it.' You just can't, babe, it doesn't exist,' said producer Lucia Aniello, quoted in the report by Glenn Garner. 'That does really put so much power of the distribution of art in the hands of algorithms and people's whims and certain executives not liking somebody's brother, so they take down their movie or show or whatever. It's really scary, the idea of

censorship, especially as more and more companies are bought up by other companies.?

?Aniello added, ?And so, we're really hoping to make a Hacks DVD box set, for one. We're trying to make that happen?. Please go buy it, not because we make any money off of it. We just want to make sure the show stays in existence for as long as DVD players exist.'?

I'll be among the first in line to get the set, if it gets off the ground ? hopefully at a bricks-and-mortar store, if possible ? not only because I thoroughly enjoyed the series itself and would like it firmly in reach, but out of the pure excitement of having a show or movie released on physical media again.

People of my generation are among many that remember the complete experience of going to a video store and discovering a new favourite flick just because something about the title or the box caught your eye and you got swept up by the synopsis on the back. If it was a new release, sometimes you could watch the entire movie in-store, if they had a nice seating area. If the picture was a real favourite, you could go back and buy a copy ? not only did it look cool on the shelf, but you could watch it whenever you wanted. On your own terms.

And ? the truth is even if you don't have a VCR to play it on anymore, if you're a true fan, the box still looks cool on the shelf.

But it's also the truth that the digital content we have come to rely on being at our fingertips might not always be within reach ? whether in whole, or in part, and the blame can't centre on someone not liking someone else's brother. It could be modified for content for any number of reasons, not the least of which is to better reflect the tastes of the day, or an individual, rather than serve as a snapshot of the reality thereof.

There is something to be said for the sheer convenience of all that can be accessed through digital means these days. But despite its advantages, it's not quite like going over to your shelf, browsing through some things, and making a choice.

By the same token, scrolling through photos on our phones or on social media, or even waiting for them to roll through again on a digital frame, might be satisfying to a degree, but shuffling through snapshots or leafing through an album just hits differently.

And books? It might be handy on a commute or while travelling to have a few e-books loaded onto your reader of choice, not only do you lose the sheer pleasure of feeling the paper between your fingers and turning the page, it's not really a book you can truly call your own or rely upon.

While we might not all have a VCR, unloaded a few old DVD players at a recent garage sale, or made your fortune unloading your printers on an enthusiastic collector with unlimited funds and space, it's important to maintain physical media for the things that matter, and even some of the things that might not seem to matter much now, so you have them in reach, when you need it, and however you define it.

You might not always have it.