

New Traditions from the New Normal

Written By BROCK WEIR

I've never been the keenest of shoppers.

One of my earliest memories is going to a local mall at the age of three or four and, for reasons I can only imagine, upon entering the Sears store, throwing myself down on the well-worn and nearly threadbare beige and maroon carpet for a practiced and well-executed temper tantrum.

I wasn't about to browse through endless displays of bath towels, impossibly arranged bedroom linens, or table upon table of plastic countertop appliances designed to solve apparently age-old kitchen problems that seemed to reach new urgency as Christmas inched closer.

Down on the ground, it was almost game over as I was pried off the floor and grudgingly dragged through the aforementioned towels, linens, and apple-corners.

I can't say for sure what started that surprisingly passionate disdain at such an early age. Nor can I say that it set the stage for a lifetime's worth of reluctant shopping. But here it is ? and while it comes and goes, I do my best to overcome it.

While online shopping has been a boon to so many of us over the years, for better or worse particularly during this global pandemic, its novelty for me only lasted so long. When it once felt like an accomplishment to get just about everything I needed to satisfy everyone on my gift-giving list from the comfort of my own screen, this faded fast.

In fact, it was a welcome change of pace when, for whatever reason, I had to cross the threshold into bricks and mortar to get that unique or one-of-a-kind item.

As it seemed inevitable last week York Region would be joining Toronto and Peel back in lockdown, I was surprised to find myself looking back fondly on an experience I would have just as soon forgot eleven months ago.

At this time last year, there were two items that I simply couldn't find locally or online. By sheer coincidence, they were located at bricks and mortar stores that just happened to be right across the street from each other a stone's throw from Toronto's bustling Bay and Bloor intersection.

As luck would have it, a friend based in the city was hosting a holiday party (remember those?), so it was the perfect storm to get these things at almost the eleventh hour.

There was another perfect storm: a sudden blast of snow around the lunch hour the next day.

There was some quick thinking involved. An afternoon appointment was rejigged to get a head start on the jaunt downtown ? after all, GO Transit is sometimes a tricky thing even in the best of weather. Also rejigged was any thought of attending the aforementioned holiday party in my seasonal best.

There was a mission to be carried out and it was going to be done come hell or high water.

It was a close one. The trip to the city took more than 90 minutes longer than scheduled and, arriving at Union Station, I had just 40 minutes before shops closed to not only get where I needed to go but also get what I needed to get, all the while with time allowed to endure what would undoubtedly be ridiculously long lines.

Somehow, everything aligned perfectly. Securing one item and running across the street to get the next, I had it in hand with two minutes to spare and get immediately back on that subway for said holiday party.

At first blush, you might be wondering what on earth is in that above scenario worth missing.

Sure, there was stress, but there was a sense of accomplishment in physically securing something that ultimately meant a lot to its recipient. Before getting on that bus, it seemed like a one-off, but wrapping the gifts the next day made me yearn for making this a re-found but ultimately new tradition. I know, hardly a revelation.

It became clear some time ago that making this a tradition for the second year running would have to wait until Christmas 2021, but, yet again on Friday, I found myself in line once again.

Sitting down at my desk on Friday morning to work on our sister paper in Aurora, it was clear the lockdown that was avoided the previous week was simply not going to be avoided again. The writing was on the wall and it was just a matter of time waiting for the Province's announcement.

Once that news came, I saved my work, made a brief list of what else I needed to finish off my list and made a personal commitment to get it done.

First up: a local housewares store to get a very small kitchen appliance that could have been easily bought online ? but, in the interests of shopping local and interacting with a live human, it was a good trade-off.

Another item took me to another store and what was on my list was found quickly and easily.

As I found my place in a short line-up not more than seven or eight people deep, I realized another item a couple of notches down on the list could be bought there as well. Getting out of line, finding the appropriate shelf, picking out the best one ? I returned to find a line that had somehow swelled to a socially distanced 20-or-so.

You can't win ?em all.

The lineup for my next and final stop had a line that spanned the width of the building, with apparently everyone getting the same idea at the same time, but it moved mercifully swift enough so I was able to check out and check off that final item with just enough time to make it to the second and final weekend of the local Christmas market.

Although this is an unusual year by any definition of the word, this renewed commitment to buy local is something I hope we will keep close to our hearts as normalcy returns, whenever that might be.

Think of it as a new holiday tradition to spring out of this challenging time.

Now, with the commercial aspect of the season out of the way, at least for me, it is time to focus on building a full fleet of new traditions to sustain us through this favourite time of the year.

With the first injections of a COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario having taken place on Monday, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. It will still be a while before we're able to fully bask in its glow, so all we can do in the meantime is our level best.

And, in the spirit of that, I would like to know what you're doing this holiday season to maintain tradition and also, at the same time, introduce new ones with the potential staying power to be part of your family's observances in the years to come.

Send your thoughts to

brock@lpcmedia.ca.