

## Seeking solace ? even in spooky season

by BROCK WEIR

Halloween is just a week away and our communities are in full swing, keen on celebrating the spooky season in style.

Whether they are municipally-organized events and gatherings, or myriad fun ideas brought to life by local businesses ? from getting a head-start on trick-or-treating to a chance to decorate pumpkins in what might be, for some, new and novel ways ? there is no shortage of opportunities to embrace your inner ghoul in the best possible way.

As most of my own plans for this past weekend were scuttled due to a scratchy throat in a bid to not spread whatever wealth was kindly bestowed upon me ? in this post-free rapid test world we're living in, it's probably best now to assume the worst until you're otherwise sure ? it was a matter of getting into the spirit of occasion from home.

So, naturally, a few scary movies were considered.

With a veritable bounty of cinematic creepiness available thanks to countless streaming services and specialty channels, it was hard to settle on just one movie. Would it be a return to well-loved classics, the more ridiculous the better? A brand-new one focused more on gore rather than suspense? A spoof designed to upend some of the more eye-rolling horror or thriller tropes?

With no decision ultimately made, conversation about the aforementioned tropes was the order of the day.

Take watching a scary movie taking place in an old house when you're all by yourself; the last thing you want to hear is the creak of a floor on-screen or off. A creak under normal circumstances is not normally a cause for concern. But, under those circumstances, that commonplace sound can make the hair on your arms stand on end.

If you light upon a movie taking place in the woods, a camp, or another wilderness setting, the distant and distinct hoot of an owl ? or, at the very least, what you and the characters might just think is hoot ? or the sound of a twig snap underfoot, chances are they're harbingers of some sort of upcoming bloody cinematic calamity.

Yet, hearing a distant crack of a branch or the snap of a twig can spur no end of panic on screen, hearing the same sound on a calm walk down one of our scores of trails or more woodsy destinations can be a sign of calm, helping to attune your senses to nature and the world around you.

If you are an 80s or 90s kid, you know all too well what I'm talking about. After all, what household in that era didn't have at least one CD lying around with music marrying the sounds of pan flutes, saxophones or harps, or some combo thereof, with those of waterfalls, rustling leaves and the sounds of distant seabirds in a bid for some sort of relaxation or New Age Zen?

Heck, in those days, you didn't even have to have one at home; all you needed to do was find a little kiosk at your local Shopper's Drug Mart, and they all had one, grab the headset affixed to the side of the display, and press a button to listen to Whispering Willows, A Winsome Walk, or Bodacious Babbling Brooks, or whatever the name of the track might be.

Of course, these tracks never really went away; they remain as they always have been, but they've also been retrofitted to suit the age we live in.

If you were a news junkie during the last US Presidential Election, for instance, you might recall these sounds coming from your TV on Election Night ? and in the several days of nonsense that followed. The good people behind Calm, an app designed to help you meditate and get to sleep, were clever enough to read the pulse of the nation ? and, indeed, much of the world ? and dedicated their ad space on multiple news networks to their ?soothing sounds.? It pushed their product, of course, but it also served to help those

who were particularly anxious about the results take some deep breaths ? if only for a minute ? and regroup before coverage continued. On that front, just like every vote, every minute counted as well.

Amid that electoral horror show, that humble twig snap was ultimately a welcome break.

Now, four years later, here we are again.

There are less than two weeks now before Americans go to the polls, and I think everyone can see that anxiety ramping up again as the day inches ever-closer ? and we're feeling it on both sides of the border.

Of course, our own homegrown politics, and the uncertainty therein, is not helping matters, and here it seems Canadians are being bombarded by stressors from just about every direction.

Election stress, found the US-based Henry Ford Health, is real ? citing data from the American Psychiatric Association stating that 73 per cent of those polled said the greater poll was causing them anxiety.

?There are two big factors at play,? said Dr. Deepak Prabhakar, Chair of Psychiatry and Behavioural Medicine at Henry Ford Health, on why this election seems a bit different. ?Several years ago, we did not have social media engagement at the level we see today. The only way we'd learn about an election would be on TV or in the newspaper once or twice a day. Now the news cycle is constant. And everyone is trying to get their stories picked up by consumers so headlines tend to be sensationalized ? even those that are factual.

?Secondly, a lack of social media meant that even if someone was constantly thinking about an election, they did not have a way to share their feelings. But today, there are social media channels in which to do that.?

In the article penned by Elizabeth Swanson, Dr. Prabhakar shared several tips to get those feeling stressed through the next couple of weeks, but they can, in my opinion, be applied all-year round, whether we're living with national and international concerns, or the proverbial ?small stuff.?

Be mindful about how you use social media.

Cultivate your personal life.

Get involved in your community.

Have respectful discussions with people on the other side of the fence.

Remember that engagement in the election is a positive sign.

?When you read a book, you go in with an open mind,? he said. ?You're learning the author's viewpoint without trying to change how they think. You might not agree with everything the author is saying, but you're open to taking it in. So, tell yourself: 'I'm just going to be listening today. I'm not here to convince anyone of anything. My purpose is to listen and understand their perspective.' If, however, you get to a point in the conversation where you're getting angry or anxious, it's okay to step away.?

If you do, perhaps you'll step towards your favourite Halloween Horror ? it might be relaxing by comparison!