

Simple steps to avoid electoral FOMO

by BROCK WEIR

People often talk about 'FOMO,' a feeling that has been boiled down to 'fear of missing out.'

It doesn't matter the situation, I don't think anyone is immune to feeling it, but what inspires the feeling itself is always unique to the individual.

Old films and TV shows frequently illustrated FOMO to comedic effect as hearing a hot piece of gossip; or, rather, Person B hearing the juicy tidbit from Person A, after they had already spread the word to Persons C, D, and E.

That might ring true for some people, but others might feel it seeing a friend's vacation pictures on their social media channels of choice, particularly if it was a trip they had planned on taking themselves but were unable to make the voyage for whatever reason.

Maybe life got in the way of going to a get-together with friends, leaving you only able to speculate on the fun that was had, the second-hand thrills of photos, texts, and emails just slightly missing the mark of recreating the magic.

We all feel it and there's precious little we can do about it.

The first time I experienced this, before I knew the acronym existed (if it was, indeed, already in the lexicon) or even knew FOMO was a feeling, was preparing for a rather lengthy working trip abroad.

At the time, it was a spot on the globe where internet access - while deeply rooted in the country and an inextricable and invaluable form of communication - was still spotty at best. Trip organizers gave us ample warning and none of the others set to get on the plane seemed the least bit concerned. I, on the other hand, felt no shortage of anxiety - and all it came down to was learning about important news events after the fact rather than seeing them unfold in real-time or reading about it as it happened.

Strange, I know, but being a news junkie is both a blessing and a curse.

Knowing there was nothing I can do about it, I did my best to relax about the prospects, and the situation ultimately turned out to be far less spotty than the grievous warnings indicated.

Since then, I've tried to keep any hints of FOMO in check.

As a fan of classic films, television and pop culture, instead of experiencing FOMO related to the myriad opportunities my American friends in larger cities have to meet people involved in the craft compared to such chances in the so-called 'Great White North,' I've celebrated their taking advantage of every single chance to do so.

Okay, admittedly, it's not always successful, but I try my best - and, at the end of the day, we're all works in progress.

Yet, oddly enough, some of the more mundane everyday things still conjure up a semblance of that dreaded feeling, particularly in election season: having a candidate show up at my door.

Now, in all fairness, I'm not home for large chunks of the day, but finding a flyer hanging from the door after the fact from a candidate seeking my vote just isn't the same as that face-to-face interaction.

By count, in the numerous elections at all levels of government that have taken place in my many years living at the same address, I've been caught a grand total of thrice by as many candidates - one Federal and one Provincial. Now, again, this isn't due to lack of

effort ? the campaign literature just inside my door is a testament to that ? it's just luck of the draw.

The perils of being a news junkie being what they are, there is always a thrill to see the candidates out on the campaign trail, making their pitch in what might be the most important job interviews in their lives, and, as a voter, being able to share your opinion. It's a very unique feeling; you count, you're part of the process, and you're part of the decision.

My long dry spell on this front mercifully ended at last on Wednesday night where, instead of hearing the non-dulcet sound of my doorbell giving the heads-up that someone had come to call, I caught the candidate and members of their campaign approaching my driveway, pamphlets in hand.

It was a nice reminder that potential lawmakers, seasoned or rookies, are actively seeking support, speaking with residents, and are actively engaging voters across the community in the democratic process.

As we have seen in so many parts of the world, a democracy is only as good as the participants ? and that includes lawmakers and average residents in equal measure. As much as we want our leaders to be active participants in steering our communities, we all have a responsibility to engage in the process, however you define it, to make sure the way they're steering is the direction you want to go.

Your candidate might not take all the chips when they fall on election night, but if you take the time to get involved, become informed and, most importantly, make an informed decision at the ballot box, you can rest just a little bit easier knowing that you were a part of it and marked your Xs according to how you would like to see the community grow and evolve over the next four years.

Municipal issues are never seen as the ?sexiest? of issues when put up against their counterparts at the Federal and Provincial levels. But, at the end of the day, they are the issues that have the most immediate impact on you and your family.

By the time this column arrives on your doorstep, there will be little over a week until election day on October 24. As of October 13, you have 11 days to consider your choices, look at your candidates, and maybe even come up with a list of questions unique to your own situation to direct to the people on the campaign trail to see how a vote for them will make a difference.

Read your local newspapers, visit candidates' websites, take a look at the campaign literature before tossing it into the blue box, and yes, open the door when a candidate comes to you.

This is your chance to help influence the future direction of your community; become engaged and take your ballot seriously ? even if only to avoid FOMO.