

Stuck in another period of twilight

By Brock Weir

Working from home can be a mixed blessing.

Speaking purely from the standpoint of a guy with no kids, my adjustment has been easier than most. But, in all honesty, it wasn't entirely smooth sailing.

One of the biggest difficulties in those early days, as I have mentioned once or twice in this space before, was not being able to come home after leaving the day's work behind at the office. Work was always present, sometimes calling me back to the screen, and the simple act of closing the door to my appointed workspace just didn't do the trick.

Given the fact that I was one of the lucky ones who still had a job all those many months ago, however, I snapped back to reality with gratitude for my situation and got on with the day. After all, what alternative was there?

The weeks and months that we have all been through have made it easier. A few days before we had our first stay-at-home orders last March, I figured what was about to come was all but inevitable and brought whatever necessities home on the Friday before. I didn't think everything through and, bit by bit, the situation has been rectified.

First, a week or two after our first health restrictions were handed down, there was a trip back to the office to collect the electric pencil sharpener. You might be scoffing at what seems like an inessential piece of office equipment, but trust me on this one. Next up was lugging home significant portions of our archives from before the days when digitization was all but a reflex. Last week, it was time for my office chair to come home - the last 10 months having wreaked havoc on my in-home swivel that has served me well since high school but has now succumbed to wear and tear the likes of which it had never seen before.

As I reacquainted myself with the far firmer office chair to begin work on this week's paper, it suddenly became almost oppressively quiet in the house. Some background music was in order. With no particular hankerings, a YouTube playlist was picked at random. Such was its randomness that I wasn't paying any particular attention to what was coming out of the makeshift jukebox, until one song all but hit me between the eyes.

Last January and February, I harboured a double-barrelled earworm. Perhaps a bit too late to the party, they were two songs that were receiving particular airplay at the time: "Gaslighter" by The Chicks and one of the latest from Alanis Morissette, "Reasons I Drink".

There was no special affinity for these songs, other than the simple fact they were, in my opinion, great returns to form and I admittedly listened to them far too often - until I stopped.

The last time I remember listening to them in earnest was one cold night almost exactly a year ago. Headed into Toronto for a performance by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the GO Bus hit some traffic on the way to the city, so out come the earbuds in a bid to pass the time.

I guess I vanquished the earworm that night because those songs were out of mind - until they popped up again last week. When that first one poured out of the speaker I could feel the hair on arms stand just slightly on end. Why? The songs were still great, but I was feeling something different. Nerves? Trepidation? Dread? Each a slightly different spin on the same family of "feels." Then, it struck.

If seasons could have an anthem, those two could have been top contenders for last winter, when we knew something was in the air and the world as we knew it was about to change.

The more I thought about what I was hearing ? and, admittedly, I had to pause once or twice to give myself a break, I realized that these two tracks, at least to my mind, evoked that strange twilight we were all experiencing one year ago this month when we knew an enemy was knocking on our door and it was only a matter of time before it burrowed its way through.

It was an odd, if disconcerting sensation to relive those feelings of nerves, trepidation and dread, along with the feeling of determination of just getting on with it until we were unable to do so without some very serious and significant adjustments. But, the more I thought about it, this trio of unfortunate emotions was tempered with a one-two punch of satisfaction and hope.

Over the last 12 months, we have collectively displayed an adaptability we have not had to roll out perhaps since the headiest days of the Second World War. Despite some difficult starts and stops, we have, out of sheer necessity, recreated our lives to get by and stay safe.

All levels of government in this country ? albeit, alas, temporarily ? put aside partisan differences to address the immediate needs of every day Canadians, issues that transcended allegiance to any party.

We have not only redefined how we conduct business ? in ways which were previously dismissed outright before necessity forced some hands ? but how we stay connected and help other, less tech-savvy friends and family navigate what might seem a brave new world.

Most of us have discovered stores of patience we never realized we had, found new appreciation for people in any number of jobs that were, perhaps, previously simply just part of our everyday lives, and even picked up some new skills along the way.

Now, despite a few unfortunate hiccups in the distribution process, there is hope on the horizon with vaccinations and an increasing number of approved inoculation suppliers.

By now, we probably all know someone who has received at least their first dose of vaccine. Indeed, every photo we see on social media of beaming friends and family exhaling in relief as they proudly point to the band-aids on their arms, is just one more brick on the road to whatever our new ?new normal? has in store for us and I, for one, am not only looking forward to its arrival but seeing what we make of it.

If the last year has taught us anything, we need to make the most of the world we have. Whatever is on the horizon, is up to us to take this opportunity, in what might be another twilight period, to define in advance what we want to achieve on the other side.

I just know, as far as music goes, I'm not going to pick any of my faves as the backdrop just in case!