

Using what we have while we've got it

It's often said that you don't know what you've got until it's gone.

That is indeed true, as anyone with a reasonable amount of time under their belt can attest; but it's also a two-way street. One sometimes doesn't know what one has, and then, when they find it, they either have no idea what it is ? or what to do with it.

Looking back on my recent move, I should have kept a list of what fell into the latter category.

For some of the seemingly random items I found sifting through my life, there was an instant spark of recognition, no matter how non-descript the object. Often this spark re-heated the sentimental value still carried by the object, followed by the difficult task of determining whether that sentiment was strong enough to carry it into the next chapter.

Take, for instance, the humble VHS tape. As I don't personally have a working VCR or any other means of playing them, I got rid of the vast, vast majority of what I came to discover was an alarmingly vast, vast collection ? but there were a couple of handfuls that I kept with me. Some, such as a trio of box sets, were imbued with that aforementioned sentiment and so many happy memories that came from unspooling them that donation to any number of organizations, or simply throwing them out, was completely out of the question. A few more I kept around just for the aesthetic value, potentially keeping a décor idea in the back of my head for another day because, quite simply, and at the risk of sounding like an old fart, they don't make cover art like they used to!

On the other hand, for some things, there was no question that it was time purge.

Somewhere along the way, I came across three pieces of wood I glued together once upon a time. I knew in the back of my mind they were part of a project ultimately abandoned, but since I had no recollection what said project was, it was a piece of useless baggage that could be discarded. Another was an extensive cache of magazines from the early aughts that were squirreled away, presumably for a rainy day ? but paper gets wet, so off to the donation piles there were placed. Maybe they made some decoupage enthusiast's day!

Most maddening of all, were those oh-so-familiar tiny pieces of perforated paper ? numbered raffle tickets emblazoned with ?KEEP THIS TICKET!? that outlived any memory of what I was supposed to keep them for. Reasonably sure none of these would lead to a significant financial windfall and early retirement, out they went? but, also maddeningly, the mystery endures.

But some items, like those VHS tapes, have turned into resources in the new domestic configuration. As much as I kept them around purely for their looks, they've turned into lightweight and practical ?bricks? on which to house beloved items in the newest abode. They've doubled as small, make-shift shelves, display platforms, and even means to prop up other items which would otherwise flop over ? with a certain panache.

Had I realised what I had previously, I would have dusted them off much sooner for deployment in this way, but necessity is the evergreen mother of invention.

In short, they were resources that I didn't really know that I had ? and while, in this instance, I'm speaking about objects, I think there are resources all around us, physical or otherwise, that we're not taking full advantage of.

Our libraries, for instance, are well-used and well-loved community resources, but, in my view, despite the efforts and creativity of staff to re-imagine these spaces for maker-spaces, creative hubs, and even performance venues, there is still, in many quarters, the view that libraries are staid and quiet places to grab a book or study. They still are, of course, but they're so much more.

Similarly, local arts venues might have the perception that they're for certain groups of people, those who might identify themselves as ?art patrons? or persons who are better heeled than others, rather than the reality of being spaces for all ? and venues where

everyone's horizons, regardless of their interests, can be broadened.

Even as I write this on March 11, Commonwealth Day, I think the same can be applied to this extensive global 'family' of nations that are being celebrated this week.

The Commonwealth, to me, always seems to be a prime resource for many things that is available at our finger tips which we rarely really think to use to our full advantage.

Of course, in this day and age, a global organization that sprang out of the former British Empire and all the baggage that comes with that, can be seen as an outmoded institution that is losing its relevancy with each passing year. But, in my opinion, relevancy is only what you make of it.

For better or worse, the vast majority of Commonwealth member states have similar histories, backgrounds, and similar challenges as we collectively come to terms with that shared history. Our efforts here at home to walk the path of Truth & Reconciliation are not dissimilar to the paths currently being walked in Australia and New Zealand, for instance, or to the paths being experienced by scores of African and Caribbean member states. We can all learn from each other.

Nor, of course, are our collective efforts to combat the challenges that will come with Climate Change dissimilar. Should the direst predictions on this front come to pass, member nation Tuvalu, a country which shares our Head of State, will be one of the first to be submerged by water. As such, they have not only done the hard work of doing everything they can to mitigate the threat, but have laid the metaphorical groundwork of 'recreating' their nation, and their culture, in a digital format. It might be an unthinkable outcome for many of us, but it is their lived reality and we can learn from it.

In a speech to mark the 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth this week, its head, King Charles, touched upon this sense of relationship.

'Together and individually, we are strengthened by sharing perspectives and experiences and by offering and borrowing the myriad ways we have tackled the challenges of our time,' he said. 'This is true both at the level of nations and, indeed, at the local level. We recognize today that our diversity is our greatest strength. The Commonwealth represents a third of humanity, from all regions of the world, with different experiences, knowledge, and aspirations that this brings.'

'We must work together to understand each other's perspectives, including the inequalities and injustices which still resonate to this day. We must find ways of healing and to support each other to pursue solutions.'

Personally, I agree, but we can only do so when we know how 'and remember ' to deploy this resource to our advantage and, of course, the resources that are closest to home and all around us.