

What we leave behind to be found

by BROCK WEIR

Nobody who knows me well will be surprised to know I'm a bit of an enthusiastic book collector.

In case the word 'collector' has some sort of connotation, it should be pointed out that I'm not a collector per se of books that serve as an investment or are sought out simply because they might be rare or valuable.

You won't find even a fragment from any of Shakespeare's first two centuries of folios around these parts. You're even less likely to discover anything printed by Johannes Gutenberg on my shelves than a copy of Steve Guttenberg's autobiography. Rather, they are books that genuinely reflect my interests - and, if they've been somewhat forgotten, neglected, and are due for a rediscovery, so much the better.

Forgotten murder mysteries by shamefully forgotten authors living in the shadows of big names like Agatha Christie, Earle Stanley Gardner, and even Stieg Larsson, for instance.

Or saucy biographies of movie stars and character actors who are best remembered by the Turner Classic Movies-viewing public than those who are considering buying advance tickets for 'Barbie' and 'Oppenheimer' this month (although, in the interests of full disclosure, I have to admit I'm in both the former and latter camps).

Beautifully-bound, but inexpensive tomes documenting specific moments of history when such volumes, and newspapers, were the only games in town.

Tangible evidence of where we've been that might even hold some clues to where we're going.

But, in every book collector's life, there comes a point where you've just about found all your 'holy grails' and the thrill of the chase, while still fun, is just a little less thrilling.

So, recently, I found myself doing what every other red-blooded collector does: accept a new mission.

I hate to be trendy, but the book passion has now extended to vinyl. Instead of absorbing the thoughts of long-forgotten voices from the words they've left on the page, I can now enjoy them through the glories of stereophonic sound, or whatever the most up-to-date listening technology was at the time of pressing.

The quest began to find two very specific albums - The Ethel Merman Disco Album (no, really), and the 1958 album 'Bill Frawley Sings the Old Ones,' pressed by the man himself at the height of his I Love Lucy fame. Ethel landed in my hands unexpectedly earlier this year, but 'Fred' still eludes me, ensuring the longevity of this venture. But, along the way, I've found so many weird and wonderful new favourites. Many of these tracks might be available on Spotify, YouTube, and various streaming services, but, like books, it's all about the hunt.

No matter what you collect, if you do have something in your life that scratches that particular itch, you know what I mean. In some aspects, at least from my perspective, it's almost like a custodial thing - bringing together, even curating, something to be enjoyed today before, at some point, passing them along to another good steward.

But sending someone a YouTube link or emailing them a PDF doesn't really have that same oomph.

Over the weekend, a piece on the CBC caught my eye. Entitled, 'Nearly 9 out of 10 classic video games are out of print. Here's why saving games matters,' writer Jonathan Ore reported that 'games released before 2010 nearly as hard to find as pre-WWII audio

recordings.?

?If you enjoyed playing video games years ago in the basement of your childhood home, you may want to go back and dust off those old machines ? because a new study says there likely won't be any other way to relive those digital memories,? he wrote. ?A study released Monday by the Seattle-based Video Game History Foundation (VGHT) says that nearly nine out of 10 classic video games are ?critically endangered' and unavailable in the modern gaming market?. The foundation says it wants the findings of the study to help push libraries and archives to do more to collect and preserve older video games, in the same way they do with classic literature, music and film. Especially because they say publishers aren't doing enough to make games available on modern digital storefronts.

?Today, only 4.5 per cent of Commodore 64 games are readily available; games from PlayStation 2 clocked in at 12 per cent. No systems boasted 20 per cent or more of commercially available titles. ?It's an enormous part of our culture and a part of our history that we're basically losing the roots of,' VGHF co-director Kelsey Lewin told Day 6 guest host Nana aba Duncan. ?We're finding it harder and harder to get access to and explore and dig into our past.' If you're interested in vintage video games, you'll likely need to find original copies in used or retro game stores, along with the original hardware needed to play them.?

Although I'm not really a gamer, I feel their pain. I might never have progressed beyond the most basic of Mario games on my then-brand-new Super Nintendo system, but I still feel their pain. Technology is great, as is going digital, but doing so is only as great as the technology we have at hand.

While studying journalism, most of my interviews as a student were completed and recorded onto MiniDisc, a Sony format that is all but dead and buried, leaving my archive, since the untimely death of my MiniDisc player/recorder, moldering away.

Here, some years of our archives were burned to CD-ROM or DVD-R, two formats that are also on their way out for flashier new models. Despite disk drives in laptops becoming rapidly a thing of the past, or an expensive luxury if you're willing to shell out the dough for the most professional of models, the quality of the storage medium has also deteriorated and, in some cases, unreadable despite our best efforts.

And don't even get me started on the floppy disk.

And what of our emails?

We learn so much of our past, both good and bad, from the paper trails our forebears, and even some of our contemporaries, have left behind. Correspondence between two individuals of influence, for example, is just one tangible primary document that has provided an unparalleled window onto the world of the past.

As much as we're moving forward, whether they are old book, old media formats, or even old video games, in the quest for the newest, flashiest medium on the market, however, I feel like we're leaving a heck of a lot behind.

Whether it is photos or videos you've stored on your phone and barely look at anymore, memories that only pop up when Facebook reminds you, or that precious, perhaps even life-changing email that currently resides solely on a hard drive or up in the cloud, what would you prioritize to ensure a hard copy, accessible to all, is left behind?

What is the voice you'd want to preserve?

Who would you like to find it?

Send your thoughts to brock@lpcmedia.ca.