

## Sweet Oblivion

By Anthony Carnovale

I'm tired. Truthfully, I'm so tired I don't even want to write this column. I don't want to write; I don't want to run. There are times where I don't even want to think or blink. That's just scratching the surface of things. I mean, I'm so tired I don't want to get out of bed most mornings. I'm tired of watching my parents get old. I'm tired of my racist neighbor who thinks Black Lives Matter. I'm tired of looking for my phone. I'm tired of people sticking out their tongues before taking a selfie. I'm tired of waiting for the internet's promises to come true. I'm tired of people putting their phone to my face and telling me 'You have to watch this video.' I'm tired of having to remind myself that Canada is not the U.S. Canada is not the U.S. Canada is not the U.S. I'm tired of being asked to be responsible and understanding. I'm tired of looking for a charger for my phone; I'm tired of Trudeau's narcissism; I'm even more tired of his apologies. I'm tired of Doug Ford's blustering pledges; I'm tired of Doug Ford's COVID updates, the one's with his 'team' standing behind him like a masked set of bowling pins. I'm tired of seeing 8.5x11 sheets of paper taped to doors and windows. I'm tired of kids driving cars that make way too much noise. I'm tired of old people saying that their right to security trumps my right to privacy. I'm tired of Donald Trump. I'm tired of not being able to focus on one thing for too long I'm tired of turning the car around because I forgot my mask.

And, of course, I'm especially tired of COVID. Not just tired, I'm flat out exhausted, exasperated. One day, a few weeks ago, while out for a run, I suddenly stopped; I couldn't move my legs. I was spent. I ended up walking the rest of the way home. It was the first time since I started running that I stopped mid-run. Begrudgingly, I had to admit to myself that I was spent - not just physically, but mentally and, dare I say, spiritually.

Since COVID hit, everything that we used to do now requires three times the effort. Things like shopping, grabbing a coffee, going for a walk, the things we did for work, for our families, for love, now have to be carefully thought through and planned. I can't open the door without thinking about COVID. At the grocery store, I'm told what direction to walk, what aisle to enter and exit from. I can't touch a piece of fruit without thinking about being infected. The other day, while having a coffee, I was asked for my contact details. It's relentless. I've been with my kids every day, all day, for five months. As much as I love and appreciate this time with them, I've been with my children all day every day for five months.

Does anybody even remember what life was like pre-COVID?

In the end, we each find our own ways to cope - that's what we do. I know I'm one of the lucky ones that didn't lose their job or have any pre-existing health conditions that could exasperate the problem. I'm lucky to live in a community with so few cases. It doesn't take away from the fact that I've grown weary. No matter how hard I try to be strong for my kids and my family, I've had my moments of weakness and vulnerability.

Before COVID, after a crazy, busy day at work and life, I got into the habit of taking a quick nap before picking up my kids from school. I'd walk into the house, kick off my shoes, saunter over to the couch and have me a 20-minute kip (British slang for nap).

For me, a good kip feels like a mini miracle. In that twenty or so minutes, I've learned to be physically still, while at the same time allowing my mind to let go of the stupid things that take so much of our waking time. I feel as if I'm existing between two worlds.

Throughout history people have turned to naps in the hopes of finding new creative and alternative takes on waking-life challenges. Artists, scientists, and spiritual practitioners have all drawn inspiration from a good, hard nap. Some have called a good kip 'a creative aphrodisiac'. Salvador Dali claimed to have mastered the micro-nap.

Sometimes at night, just before bed, before I finish what I'm reading, I'll put down my book and shut my eyes. I won't let myself sleep, but I allow myself to get close to it. Everything is still, minus the sounds. I hear my daughter's night owl and its lullaby; I can hear my son pulling the covers over his head; my wife is downstairs pouring herself a glass of wine. I'm here, there, but I'm not. It's

almost transcendent. Winston Churchill said that a good nap is like 'blessed oblivion'.

In a couple of weeks, our home routine is going to be upset. I'm sending my children back to the classroom, while my wife and I are headed back into our respective schools. We're anxious about it. I'm looking forward to seeing my students, teaching them, listening to them and building and creating with them. I'm beginning to think about what my classroom is going to look like, and how it's going to operate. I'm worried about our health and safety.

It won't be easy, and that's okay. What worries me is the lack of a clear, coherent return-to-work plan. Truthfully, I'm tired of being asked to put my faith in a government with such a poor track record when it comes to planning and executing said plans. I'm also tired of being expected to put my faith in school boards that are always so slow in responding to change.

But, no matter how tired I am, I have to find the energy; I need to find it for the sake of my children, and for my students. These are challenging times, and we all need to play our part in imagining and dreaming a better world, inside and outside of COVID.

There's a passage in Ali Smith's novel 'Winter' that summed up what I've been going through. It reads: 'He thinks about how, whatever being alive is, with all its pasts and presents and futures, it is most itself in the moments when you surface from a depth of numbness or forgetfulness that you didn't even know you were at, and break the surface and when you do its akin to- to what?'

I've been thinking a lot about the 'what' these past few months. I've thought about it so much that I can't even think about the who, the when, the why, or the how. The time for those questions will come. Perhaps, this is something my students and I can explore in the classroom. In the meantime, I need to rest and recharge; I need some sweet oblivion.