

Opinion: A Holiday Season to Try JOMO

Elizabeth Pimentel

The New York Daily News

December 23, 2020

I suffer from a serious case of FOMO – the Fear of Missing Out. It's the distress over not being included in something that others are experiencing or anxiety that one might pass up an opportunity, and I know the malady is pretty widely shared in this age of scrolling Facebook, Instagram and Twitter feeds.

At first, the pandemic gave me the chance to break free of FOMO and revel in JOMO, the Joy of Missing Out – enjoying what you're doing in the here and now and not worrying about what everybody else is doing. My dance and exercise classes were canceled; I lost my job as an adjunct college lecturer; my car sat unused; I was sheltering at home, and so was everyone else.

The dearth of opportunities was soon replaced by a limitless number of online classes. The constant stream from Facebook, Twitter, and my email, not to mention Zoom meetings, cellphone calls and texts, has kept me socially connected, yet is overwhelming. I yearn for the electronic detox my son Felix and I took part in every year from his age of 5 to 14.

For four days each summer Felix would unplug from video games, and we'd camp at an isolated site on a lake in the remote mountains of western Maine, accessible only by boat. Our nearest neighbor was a quarter of a mile away – on the opposite shore. We had no electricity or internet, and had intermittent cellphone reception by kayaking 500 feet from shore where I checked for important calls. In disconnecting my son from technology I realized how freeing it was for me, too. My decisions had to do with survival: eating, staying dry, safe, and comfortable

in our tent. I'd made many of the choices beforehand, having packed gear, food, maps, and clothing. Not needing to think about these things gave my brain room to contemplate such things as: "Should we hike or swim?" "Should I make eggs over-easy or scrambled for breakfast?"

Most of the time "missing out" was a joyful experience. Together we would snorkel, kayak, explore, hunt for edible wild mushrooms, look for moose, and play chess and Frisbee on the beach. One year, however, due to a particularly rainy summer, there was a mosquito infestation at our campsite, and our organic insect repellent was insufficient to ward off the hordes of pests. We spent lots of time in the water, and while on land, stayed completely covered by clothing or in our tent till we were able to get our hands on bug spray made of the "hard stuff."

I recall those times, getting out of my day-to-day existence with Felix, as being especially precious. As he grew older I realized I was in a losing battle with a fixed resource – his childhood. Yet, in nature we both turned into little kids again, and the feeling of innocence returned. I had time for introspection, too. On the lake, exposed to the elements such as a sudden lightning storm, I became aware of our vulnerability and felt that we were a tiny part of this world. Nature triggers us to be in the present.

Friends would say, "You're such a trooper."

I would reply, "I'm allowing myself to recharge."

And for Felix, experiencing JOMO worked. Back at school he was inspired to paint a number of pictures based on our adventures. We collaborated on a poem about a moose. Later, he would write about these experiences in his college essay. Now an adult teaching sixth graders

remotely, he says, “Those camping trips gave me an appreciation for technology. Yet I felt more self-sufficient knowing I can live without it.”

Breaking free of technology and all the options it provides is empowering, but it requires work. FOMO typically becomes worse during the holiday shopping season as we are bombarded with online marketing campaigns proclaiming unmatched deals and sales that will soon end. Over-the-top social media displays further aggravate the condition.

We can't all travel to a secluded lake for a remedy. But we can find pleasure in JOMO here at home if we make the effort. My New Year's resolution is to set parameters by limiting my screen time, keeping to a schedule, creating opportunities to unplug in the coming year – a walk, a hike, a bike ride – and embracing the joy of missing out.

