

Ways to cope when the world had gone mad

Gayle Nichol - March 2025

“I just felt like running.”

That iconic line from the venerable Forrest Gump is so familiar to me I feel it in my soul. Not the words, but the feeling.

When life gets too much and there is so much of it swirling in my head, just like Forrest, I move.

I find something new, some never before tried adventure or activity and I get busy. Sometimes to find joy. Sometimes to achieve a goal. Often simply to escape the chaotic jumble of thoughts that are tenacious and nagging in their demand for my anxious attention.

I did, in fact, run for many years until aches and pains made it more injurious than enjoyable. Now I walk with a barbell packed beer cooler on a treadmill in the warmth of my home during winter's scourge and outside on the byways of Lambton County in the soft earth and rich sweet smells that promise spring is on its way.

The constant threats to Canadian sovereignty, the regular tariff talk, and watching the only world order you have ever known wobble under the strain of ideas and rhetoric that mock the very foundation that has allowed the world to prosper for 80 years is unnerving. I'm rattled. I've been rattled since November 5, 2024 when an unfortunate choice by our neighbours meant the whole world would come off its humane axis.

And so, I immediately began to make sourdough.

Fermenting flour and water, keeping it warm, feeding my starter and watching her grow, fulfills a process. Four months on, I have yet to make an actual loaf of sourdough bread. I did that a lot during the pandemic years, thus the need for the running and walking. This time I just feed her, nurture her, keep her warm and watch her grow. It's something I can do, a small thing I have control over in a world where I control very little else. It's just a few minutes a day that my head is clear of everything except this magnificent blooming bottle of starter.

I have other pursuits to try to quell the chaos. I have been crocheting for months now, churning out blankets at the speed of a train. I call them anxious afghans. I'm anxious so I make afghans. I also have finished a number of nervous knitting throws, perfect when you need just a little comforting lap blanket. I have four books on the go. All of them are excellent at keeping the real world at bay, although one of them continues to immerse me in a fae battle between warring courts. I don't always want sabre rattling in my fiction when there's enough of it in my reality, so that may be the last book to have the final page turned.

And if that weren't enough distraction, my dining room table is now covered in beads as I embark on my newest fixation of bracelet making. In my head I hear Forrest saying, “I just felt like bead-ing.”

I guess the shiny glass bits tapped into the primal part of my brain that said I just had to have them. Now, I spend my evenings more frustrated than not, stringing happy coloured beads into pretty rounds for wrists and ankles. For just a bit of time, there are no tariffs, there are no former friends making allegiances with the wrong side, there are no threats against sovereignty or dismantling of basic human rights and imposed barriers to a free press.

In these quiet nighttime pursuits, I am reminded that I only have to get through another three years and nine months of this insanity. Surely there are enough books, beads, flour, yarn, barbells and Lambton County roadways to get me to the end, to the point where Forrest stops, turns around and says, “I'm kinda tired, think I'll go home now.”

Then, we can rest.