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BROCK'S BANTER: Toast of the Town

Okay, kids of the late 1980s and early 1990s, now is the moment of truth: if you ever have the occasion to burn a piece of toast, how many of you second guess your own culinary skills and consider the possibilities of a neurological disorder before extinguishing the smouldering piece of Wonder Bread?

For some of you of an older generation, this might be confirmation finally (finally?!) that I might be a little unusual, but I'd wager people of my generation know exactly what I am talking about.

We were in our formative years when Historica Canada started releasing their ?Heritage Minutes? showcasing vignettes of our collective history purporting to be ?a proud part of our Canadian heritage.?

Making a comeback just in time for Canada's 150th Birthday celebrations later this year, they were once a ubiquitous part of the Canadian television experience. And, having grown up in the wilds of Newmarket, living in a six channel universe until I was 16, they were inescapable.

By the middle of elementary school, any Canadian worth their salt knew the gist of Joe Shuster and the Canadian origins of Superman. How different life would have been if young Joe lost his grip on his sketch of the Man of Steel and it got crunched by his train.

Then there was the vignette of Agnes Macphail, Canada's first female Member of Parliament, who brought the men in the House of Commons with the smack of a bullwhip down on the desk highlighting the abominable treatment inmates were receiving in the Canadian penal system.

Yes, I remember the kid who sat beside me in our Grade Two class smacking his pencil case down on his desk and shouting, ?Is this normal?!? in a depiction of Agnes which would have made Jessica Lange jealous.

It was also through these Heritage Minutes that so many of us learned that Laura Secord was actually not a chocolatier rather a heroine of the War of 1812, although her order of ?Take me to Fitzgibbon!? always struck a few of us as a little bit demanding. Ms. Secord, it's ?take me to Fitzgibbon, please.?

Then, there's the toast.

As most of you know, this particular Heritage Minute starts with an average 1930s Montreal housewife telling her husband that toast is burning. As he pooh-poohs his wife's comment (women!) she collapses on the floor in an alarming seizure that is seared in our collective consciousness.

Cut to Average Montreal Housewife on the operating table undergoing brain surgery at the hands of Dr. Wilder Penfield. He's probing around in there to stimulate the smell of blackened bread, eventually finding the right spot and, thus, being able to treat others experiencing the same phenomenon.

Perhaps it is the history geek in me, but I was rather excited to learn these Heritage Minutes would form the centrepiece of the Family Day Celebrations at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Heading over there on Monday afternoon after taking in many of the activities on tap at Town Park as part of Aurora's Arctic Adventure celebrations ? a huge success this year thanks to the sun and the warmer weather, although it wreaked havoc with the outdoor rink ? I headed over there for a bit of education and nostalgia.

Well, truth be told, I follow the Cultural Centre on Instagram and I also wanted to score the special ?Burnt Toast? button created especially for the occasion, but I digress.

It was nice to see so many of the classics on display for a wider audience, particularly a younger audience who might have been seeing these for the first time.

Intermingled among the older vignettes were some of the newer entries, which provided something of a stark contrast. Although the original minutes tackled some of the headier topics like the already mentioned penal reform, war, the challenges faced by youth migrating to Canada, and a cursory exploration of racism in the form of Jackie Robinson and the integration of baseball, it is, in all honesty a presentation of Canadian history that can best be described as ?chocolate box.?

It is rather sanitized and avoids a lot of the grit and turmoil that, to many, make Canadian history interesting.

The Heritage Minute on the Famous Five, for instance, focuses on Judge Emily Murphy. A very important woman in Canadian history whose achievements aren't to be diminished, it features Kate Nelligan as the Heroine of the Minute describing herself as ?author of the Janey Canuck books, pioneer in the war against narcotics, first female magistrate in the empire?but not a person.? A pioneer in the war on drugs, indeed, but it fails to mention the racial motivators in that particular quest, and doesn't mention at all her pioneering work in the eugenics movement.

Abhorrent views to the majority, but interesting nonetheless.

The tide seems to be shifting.

New Heritage Minutes highlight the journeys ? often impeded ? by Canada's indigenous peoples, including the horrors of Canada's residential schools systems, as well as Viola Desmond, Canada's once-forgotten and now celebrated Civil Rights pioneer unjustly arrested in trumped up charges for sitting in the whites-only section of a Halifax movie theatre.

Ours is a history not always romantic, not always triumphant, and not always tolerant, and this is now coming to light. ?Embraced? isn't the right word, but it is being taken to heart and informing a better-versed generation of kids who are growing up with the next generation of Heritage Minutes.

These commercials instilled a sense of pride in me and a juvenile belief that Canada has always been a peace-loving, tolerant society. They were nice building blocks, but building blocks on the road to a much rounder perspective.

As Canada prepares to mark its 150th anniversary, these up-and-comers now have noticeably more building blocks ? and, most importantly, accessible building blocks ? on the road to forming their own perceptions on Canadian identity and what it means to be Canadian and it will be interesting to see how these seeds germinate in time for Canada's 175th in 2042 and the Bicentennial in 2067.

Between the Heritage Minutes unspooled at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Monday, coupled with the presentation by the White Pine Dancers over at Town Park, reminding so many of our kids that many of the perceptions of ?the red Indian? can be chalked up to the likes of Walt Disney, our history could be on the cusp of a rejuvenation ? warts, burnt toast, and all.