

BROCK'S BANTER: Making a memory

By Brock Weir

On Sunday evening, I was in Toronto to see Bombshell, the new documentary on actress-cum-inventor Hedy Lamarr, whose innovation is everywhere you look ? including in your own pocket.

It's a magnificent portrait of an elusive star, grappling with the dual reality of who she is, who she appears to be to the outside world, realizing all too late the importance of receiving the recognition one deserves.

As masterful as the storytelling is, woven largely with Lamarr's own voice, perhaps my lasting image of this evening's screening with director Alexandra Dean, hosted by Nathalie Atkinson, will be of an elderly woman being lovingly guided out of the theatre by a man I presume to be her 60-something son.

If you've lived it, you know the signs. This was a woman in the mid-stages of dementia: a face not that far removed from a much more vital existence, belied by a distance behind the eyes; snow white hair arranged for efficiency rather than glamour; dressed for an evening out in a sweatshirt in that unique shade of not-quite-green not-quite-blue no one buys for themselves; clutching a small plush lion in her weathered, storytelling hands.

As a security blanket, the choice of a little lion was an appropriate one for an evening out with an MGM star, but it was another tell-tale sign of where she has been and, sadly, where she is going.

But where has she been on this life's journey? Why, of all places, did her son bring her out to see Bombshell?

Probably a good 10 or 15 years shy of being Hedy Lamarr's contemporary, did she once share memories with her son of growing up with images of this otherworldly goddess up on the silver screen larger than life?

Did these experiences in a darkened theatre sow the seeds of ambition within, or even the seeds of unrealistic expectation?

Did every Lion's Roar give her pause to think, ?I'm going to be up there someday??

Did she try to follow that dream?

And what of her son?

Sure, it's nice to have a night out with mom, but why this documentary and why tonight?

Perhaps he is the one with happy memories of going with mom to see Samson & Delilah on the big screen as a boy, of letting him stay up past his bedtime to watch Algiers on the late, late show, their mutual love of Hedy Lamarr a secret shared only between them.

If they did share a special bond over Hedy Lamarr, was he hoping the rare opportunity of once again seeing the actress larger than life on the big screen would, even for a moment, renew that spark between them before the lights went up?

Whatever this mother and son were craving when they came into Bloor Hot Docs on Sunday, I hope they soaked in every moment of the experience while they can and found what they sought.

In the end, we're all in this to make a memory or, at the very least, hold onto the ones we have.

Sometimes these memories can be forged sitting in front of a flickering screen, rekindled by an heirloom, brought vividly back to life from a smell emanating from a kitchen, or through an unexpected encounter with an equally unexpected texture.

Here in Aurora, there are some people for whom memories will come flooding back simply by entering the doors of the former Aurora Public Library building on Victoria Street, a monument that has outlived its practicality and will meet the wrecking ball sometime in the month ahead.

For many, it will be the place that first fostered a love of reading that has stood the test of time, a place where they made lifelong friends through story time, sitting cross-legged on the brown carpet watching a puppet show, or formed the first wrinkle on their now-furrowed brow, poring over a textbook in a quiet corner cramming for an upcoming test.

Although I have used this space to express varying degrees of exasperation on how long it has taken to get to this point ? over 18 years, for those keeping score ? now that the end is near, I think it is time for the building, which served Aurora well, only to fall into relative disrepair over its state of certain limbo, to be given a proper send-off.

The building itself might not be anything to look at ? after all, a brown brick box is a brown brick box ? but the fact it was (and is) Aurora's Centennial gift to itself lends those humble brown bricks a vestige of faded grandeur.

Sitting at the Committee level last week, Council gave the go-ahead contracting Priestly Demolition to raze the old building and the adjacent former home of the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

Along with the demolition contract came questions from Councillors John Abel and Wendy Gaertner, along with Mayor Dawe, whether recovery efforts will be made on the building ahead of the demolition.

While the Council members were assured a plaque commemorating the dedication of the Library would be recovered, the Councillors said they would like to see recovery go one step further: salvaging some of the remarkable woodwork inside the building.

Councillor Abel's comments focused on the large wood beams which are, particularly from the west, one of the only noteworthy architectural features of the building. Councillor Gaertner, on the other hand, drew attention to wood indoors, questioning the powers-that-be over the lovely wood ceilings that still cover the second floor.

?It would be really a shame to see all of that wood put in a dumpster,? she said. ?I don't know what we're going to do with it, but I am sure it is certainly worth something because it is beautiful wood.?

Al Downey, whose department is overseeing the demolition, was also at a loss of what to do with the wood, at a loss of where the wood might be stored, as well as at a loss on whether these recovery efforts could take place at all as recovery was, curiously, not factored into the Request for Proposal ultimately won by Vic Priestly's company.

There is not, in my view, a shortage of use for any wood recovered.

A parking lot is, if all goes according to plan, not going to be the final fate of Library Square. Whether the temporary parking lot is turned into a public square or covered over with a multiuse building that would be a showpiece for Aurora regardless of its final form, I can think of no better way to honour the past well into the future by outfitting a new building or a public square with examples of the old wood.

If that is too avante garde a suggestion, I am sure the creative minds at the Aurora Seniors' Centre wood shop, who continue to transform wood felled from the so-called Maple Leaf Forever tree into beautiful pieces of art, could transform this wood into unique items that could turn a tidy profit or, as plaques for the Community Recognition Awards, be used to honour our citizens.

The old library might be going to its great reward, but its rich legacy doesn't have to. In the right hands, it can live on. What's left could serve to inspire generations to come and once the opportunity has passed, it's not likely to return.