

BROCK'S BANTER: A celebration of who we are

By Brock Weir

A passport can only guarantee so much these days.

It promises safe passage, sure, but that is not entirely in your hands.

Before you go anywhere, you need to do your due diligence to make sure you have whatever you might require, bone up on the local traditions and customs so you can get yourself through the minefield with minimal disruption, stress, and distress, and make sure you're as up to date as you can possibly be on your destination's political climate so, once again, you can navigate yourself through whatever situation through which you might have to navigate.

Some of these waters are rougher than others, but it is a strange feeling when they're basically lapping up on your shoreline.

It's equally strange when you're preparing to go into the United States not entirely sure what you are going to get. I try to get down there a few times a year to visit myriad friends scattered throughout the country and lately, as I am sure many of you can appreciate, preparing for the trip is a very different animal than it was just a couple of years ago.

The first time I noticed it was a trip to Manhattan last June.

It was my first visit to the United States since the previous fall's Presidential election and given the reports of divisiveness we had been receiving since that time, I was unsure what I would be experiencing. Granted, Manhattan is typically a diverse Democratic stronghold, so chances were this divisiveness would not be evident on the surface.

This was, in the end, very much the case. While some people I know to be particularly civic and politically minded were, perhaps in hindsight, just a little bit less forthcoming with their personal views in everyday public conversation, lest, of course, they be overheard by the "wrong people", people more or less appeared to be on the same page and truth be told, this particular page was one of derision of the current administration.

My next trip, over the New Year's holiday to the same destination, followed a similar pattern.

April, on the other hand, was very much a different story.

Before departing for Dallas, TX, I was given a few pointers from my host.

Don't mention Trump, he advised, because the very drop of the name would attract a flurry of MAGA hat-wearing supporters who would likely be packing heat in the open-carry area.

He didn't have to tell me twice.

Well, maybe he did, as I didn't exactly try to hide my light under a bushel, damn the consequences. After all, we're always told it is not healthy to bottle things up!

These pre-flight tips were, of course, well-intentioned, but perhaps they were a little bit alarmist. Aside from a couple of turned heads, the best I got out of someone was a huff or a snort.

This past week, however, offered a very different experience.

Once again in New York City for my annual summer vacation - usually always taken at the beginning of June, but delayed this year to see the 2018 Provincial Election through to its thrilling conclusion! - there was a strained atmosphere.

Maybe it would have been different had I gone at the beginning of the month when the issue of migrant children separated from their families at the nation's southern border was just simmering away on the backburner, but this simmer had turned into a violent boil by the time I had arrived.

It appeared as though the people I was visiting were shouldering a burden, a yoke, a feeling veering dangerously close to being defeated.

This sense of defeat was bolstered by anger but, at the same time, tempered with a sense of helplessness.

"This is what it is like," said one friend over lunch, before getting interrupted by another.

"This is what what is like?" I pressed, once conversation swung back my way.

"I keep thinking, this is what it must have been like to live in Nazi Germany, knowing what you're living and seeing every day is wrong you can't figure out what you can do about it," he continued.

This floored me. Although, truth be told, the thought had crossed my mind, looking on from the comfort of Canada, hearing it out of the mouth of an American brought reality down with a thud.

Thankfully, this exchanged spurred a further discussion around the table on just what could, in fact, be done to effect change, in however small a way, and that sense of defeat was turned around into determination.

And here I thought the only thing I had to face was guilt about pumping money into the U.S. economy in the middle of a trade war

on a trip that was booked well before the tariffs dropped.

I write this with less than a week to go before Canada Day.

In contrast to what has been going on in the United States, at this time last year, many of us here in Canada were living with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we were gearing up for the Canada 150 celebrations, a party over a century-and-a-half in the making, a thought which initially appeared to be a cause for celebration. On the other, as the day approached, we were increasingly reminded of the darker aspects of our own history, particularly the treatment experienced by Indigenous peoples at the hands of European settlers.

?A celebration?? many started asking. ?What is there to celebrate??

Indeed, initial thoughts of a ?celebration? ultimately ? although hardly uniformly ? turned into a ?commemoration? and, ultimately reflection about where we've been and where we're going.

As attention now turns to Canada Day, perhaps it is time once again to celebrate who we are now, what we stand for, and double down on preserving what it is we actually have here as a nation.

Sadly, as we have come to see in recent years, what we have, what was once shared, can be all too fragile.