

BROCK'S BANTER: A light on a simpler time

By Brock Weir

I've never been one to moon over any particular era being of a 'simpler time.'

It's a well worn cliché which has inexplicably taken hold in our psyche for reasons which have never been clear to me.

Every time I've heard someone haul out that hoary old chestnut, I almost involuntarily roll my eyes because it's a symptom of more than just nostalgia; it's an indication that whomever is offering that turn of phrase is going through something, be it a particularly warm and fuzzy memory, recalling time with a loved one no longer with us, or even a place when their inner turmoil was merely on a slow boil.

When you go beneath the surface, however, chances are your warm and fuzzy memories have taken on an artificial patina.

Just a few decades ago, race issues were the order of the day, generations of Canadians were still grappling with the reality of so many lost to war and attempting to carve out their new normal, and women were trying to crack through many more glass ceilings than they still, unfortunately, encounter today.

Nothing was ever simple; nothing will ever be and yet, over the past few months, I've found myself reconsidering this whole premise.

On Sunday, we finished off decorating our Christmas tree.

It's not a real Christmas tree, although we had, until last year, luxuriated in the smell of a fresh evergreen more often than not.

Rather, it's one of those nifty pre-lit porch trees, complete a gold-sprayed base, and permanently affixed pine cones and assorted berries.

It came into the house from a local hardware store last year when the quest for the perfect 'real' tree proved fruitless. No matter which tree lot I happened to go to, I was coming up empty. Many of the trees were misshapen, others too big or too small. Some were missing branches, others were dropping needles faster than Donald Trump drops ill-informed tweets.

So, to spare myself any further anguish, I took the path of least resistance and found a reasonable facsimile. Two years on, it has proven to be a wise investment and has fit into our Christmas traditions reasonably well.

Feeling particularly festive this year, the tree went up far earlier than normal - the weekend after Remembrance Day - and, since that time, we have been enjoying the simple, embedded white lights, pine cones and berries. But the time had come to gussy it up like a Solid Gold dancer.

While I unpacked the tree decorations, and the bulb hooks which, in the intervening eleven months, had somehow detached themselves from their respective bulbs and had inexplicably gone missing, we decorated the tree to the mellifluous sounds of Burl Ives on CBC's broadcast of the traditional holiday favourite, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, an animated tale which has warmed the hearts of generations of kids, parents and grandparents since it debuted over 50 years ago.

By the time the tree was half-dressed in balls of red, light green and gold, I paused and marvelled at the show. It has a timeless message we can all resonate with (after all, who among us has never thought about pitching a tent on the Island of Misfit Toys?) and lessons of inclusion and acceptance that are more relevant today than ever before.

For a brief moment in time, I thought how nice it would be to hop in a time machine for a quick stop in front of a big, unwieldy television set, a machine which might take a minute or two to warm up, sitting excitedly cross-legged on the floor, face pressed up almost against the glass so as to not miss a single frame of the stop-motion animation. It would be a stop in a place far away from here, where reports of hate crimes, particularly incidents of anti-Semitic hate, are becoming alarmingly regular occurrences in our community.

If I had a time machine at my disposal, yes, the DeLorean would have dumped me off in a time when the Cold War was at its height and, down south, the Civil Rights movement was in a particularly contentious and hate-filled place.

But, would it be all that different?

We're now living in a world where the former key Cold War players are switching up sides and creating a new alarming dynamic, a world where one of the most powerful people in the world, not to mention those in his party, are making hate speech not only acceptable but encouraged; and a world where nuclear war is once again becoming a threat, only to be knocked back in the public consciousness by focusing on whatever insane rambling is coming out of an iconic white house in Washington D.C.

A few months ago, The Auroran ran a poll on whether or not our readers had seen an increase in hate speech since the start of 2017, not coincidentally in line with the inauguration of the President of the United States. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the result was a resounding yes.

Now, we are seeing that manifest itself within Aurora in tangible ways, whether they were swastikas painted on the road and on utility boxes in the Town's southwest quadrant, hateful messages spray-painted near Hartman Public School, the recent anti-Semitic messages scrawled onto an outbuilding at Aurora High School and more swastikas freshly covered at Yonge and Kennedy Streets. This past fall, I wrote of my scepticism over a Councillor Kim's push to have Aurora's Tree Lighting Ceremony branded as a 'Christmas Tree Lighting' celebration. He said the word 'Christmas' had been left off for 'reasons unknown' although we can all imagine what that reason was.

Nevertheless, Council went ahead with his motion and, with the inclusion of a Christmas Market, the 2017 Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony was an unqualified success.

But, it is paying unexpected dividends leading to the Town of Aurora's inaugural Menorah Lighting Ceremony this Monday, December 18.

Organized partly in response to being as inclusive as possible to all faiths following the rebrand and also organized in the wake of the most recent anti-Semitic attack at Aurora High School, Mayor Dawe and Rabbi Hecht have approached the same core message from different directions.

'We stand in unity and we want to spread the universal message of freedom, illuminating and adding light into the world,' said Rabbi Hecht.

Added Mayor Dawe: 'No one is born hating. We can teach that there is a better way to go about life.'

And, indeed it is.

I encourage everyone in the community to come out to Town Hall on Monday night at 5.30 for the ceremony, not only to shine a light but to send a clear message to our community that while some things might, unfortunately, be the new normal for so many in the United States, it is not welcome here.

Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer is now 53 years old, and will likely still be going strong on whatever is waiting to replace the air waves 53 years from now.

Let's just hope that Aurorans who come out on Monday will not, 53 years hence, look back on the ceremony with nostalgia, harkening back to our present as a much simpler time than what they might be experiencing in theirs.