

BROCK'S BANTER: AND THEN IT CLICKED

When I was a youngster, I always asked my paternal grandmother to take out her wallet. I wasn't looking for a handout, of course, although the occasional slip of an old orange \$2 bill was always welcome, but the real reason was just behind her credit cards. Below the plastic was a small pocket and inside the pocket was an old Canadian silver dollar. It was a coin that you might ordinarily glance over. By the time I got around to seeing it, it no longer gleamed in the light. Time and touch made any semblance of shine a memory of the past, replaced with a worn patina, beautiful in its own way. Underneath the tarnish was a depiction of Parliament's Centre Block and its showpiece Peace Tower. The purpose of the coin was to commemorate the visit later that year of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the first reigning sovereigns to visit Canada. This coin, my grandmother invariably explained, was her lucky coin. At that time, my interest in the coin was purely numismatic and I did not have the foresight to ask how it became so lucky to her. By the time it was clear she was suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, I soon regretted not taking the opportunity to gain some insight on why this coin had become something of a talisman, seemingly on her person at all times. It was, I thought, a question that would remain in the back of my mind, its answer apparently lost in the ether. Last Wednesday, however, something finally clicked and, in hindsight, the answer now appears patently obvious. That evening, the CBC website ran a story on a multimillion dollar proposal to dig an expansive new basement underneath Parliament. The merits of spending such a vast amount of money on something as simple as a basement were examined from both sides. The bedrock deposits underneath Parliament Hill are nothing to sneeze at and will take some resources to remove. But, of course, there was the question of whether a new basement was needed. As someone who once worked in Parliament, took a wrong turn in the tunnel connecting the West and Centre blocks, found myself stuck at the bottom of a ridiculously narrow spiral staircase that apparently had not been used since the King-Byng Crisis, with no other option other than going up, and doing so only to find myself popping through a tiny door from the bowels of our seat of democracy right into the middle of a rare scrum in the first year of the Harper administration, the need for change was not lost upon me. But that wasn't what caught my eye. What they zeroed in on was a passing reference to the fire that destroyed the Centre Block 100 years ago this week. In 1916. On February 3, 1916. The very day my grandmother was born. Out of the ashes rose something better, stronger and more enduring. Did this connection have a resonance with her? Did she derive some sort of strength from it? Was this why she saw the coin as a good luck charm? I'll never know for sure, but I like to think so. And I like to think I found a missing piece of the puzzle that has been hiding in plain sight all this time, right in time for what would have been her own centennial. One piece of the puzzle remains, however: whatever happened to that silver dollar?

VICTORIA DAY

That silver dollar commemorated the milestone visit by George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the parents of our present Queen, who marks the remarkable 64th anniversary of her ascension to the Throne this Saturday, February 6. A 64th anniversary is not one of the biggies but, in the grand scheme of things, it is still a milestone worth commemorating. At the end of last summer, I had the privilege of being a part of the planning of the Town of Aurora's community celebration on September 9 to mark the moment Queen Elizabeth II officially became the longest reigning monarch in modern Canadian history, just sneaking past the record long-held by Queen Victoria. It ultimately turned out to be a well-attended event with people coming to celebrate the occasion from across York Region and the GTA. I took great pride in how things turned out and, of course, provided plenty of opportunities to brainstorm for the future.

While a 64th anniversary is not the cause for a grand celebration, there is something on the radar the Town might want to consider down the line.

On April 21, the Queen celebrates her milestone 90th birthday.

It is a birthday that will be celebrated in grand style in the United Kingdom with equestrian parades, a mammoth street party in London, along with the ceremony the Brits do so well.

But a few short weeks after that is Victoria Day, the Sovereign's Official Canadian Birthday.

If you're a Monarchist, you're very cognizant that Victoria Day is a double-barreled celebration not only of Victoria, but the reigning sovereign as well. If you are less inclined towards the monarchy, it is the unofficial start of the summer, the time to formally open up the cottage, or head out to enjoy a day in the sun. Some people do both ? and there is nothing wrong with that!

But, as far as Aurora goes, there is nothing by way of a Victoria Day event; an event where families can come together to mark the unofficial start of the summer, if not the historic roots of the holiday.

The closest thing Aurora has to a community event that weekend is, of course, the Aurora Farmers' Market.

With the Queen's 90th Birthday on the horizon, perhaps the time is right to give some thought on Aurora finally getting in on the Victoria Day action, providing a reason for the community to come together rather than head out of Town en masse, as seems to be tradition, and forming a new, enduring tradition.

It can be something as simple as doing something to soup up already scheduled events at the Aurora Farmers' Market or something a little grander.

Councillor Harold Kim's suggestion of a multicultural festival has been simmering away on the backburner long enough for scum to form on the surface. Perhaps it is time to remove the film and give Aurora a teaser of what could be.