

BROCK'S BANTER: Aye or Die?

By Brock Weir

Do you ever find it alarming when what you thought were long-sleeping roots suddenly kick into high gear?

I am not talking about a dormant follicle that has inexplicably started to bear fruit, or a tree that seemingly shot up overnight after decades as a shrub, but those roots deeply imbedded in your soul and your psyche.

My own roots are a veritable mixed bag of bland. The most exotic part of my background is a splash of First Nations blood courtesy of my paternal grandfather's mother. The rest is as boring a blend as Campbell's Cream of Mushroom soup. In other words, WASP-y. You name it, it's in there. A bit of English, a dose of Dutch, a shot of Irish, a smattering of German, and a complicated mixture of Swiss-by-way-of-Germany that can't decide what the heck it is. Blend this all together and you have basically got a third of this writer. The other two thirds are irretrievably Scottish.

And what a bad Scotsman I am. At the risk of raising the ire of the many members of the Royal Canadian Legion, I have personally never seen the point of a Burns Supper, particularly standing for, and genuflecting at, a boiled and stuffed sheep's stomach while the same tired verses are repeated year after year. I'm not a particular fan of oatmeal, nor have I ever had a deep-fried Mars bar. I've never worn a kilt, although a rumour did circulate briefly in Grade 9 that I did so in my spare time, nor have my lips ever touched a bagpipe.

I am reconsidering all of this this week as those Scots roots have burrowed out of my consciousness trying to make up for lost time. Unless you have been living under a rock ? or under the Stone of Scone, to continue exhausting my theme ? this Thursday, September 18, is crunch time in Scotland. By the time this lands on your doorstep, Scots (and residents therein) are likely finishing up their trips to the polls to decide whether or not to leave the United Kingdom. By the time of this writing, the ?No? vote against independence is slightly ahead at 52 per cent, while the Yes to go it alone trails at 48. Very few appear to be undecided and whether you are personally for or against the union, that in itself is a very good thing.

Even though I am a dyed-in-the-wool and unabashed Anglophile (I am sure that's how the kilt rumours got started, geography be damned) I am very surprised at how interested, and invested, I feel in the outcome. These Scots roots are at odds with themselves on whether or not independence from the United Kingdom would be a good or bad move.

On one hand, maybe I have been unduly influenced after finding myself an unusually politically-minded Grade 5 student when Quebec voters last went to the polls in 1995 to decide their own fate. On the other, perhaps my mind is simply reeling at the historical possibilities that will unfold if the vote goes against the Union. After comfortably sharing a bed and a home for the past 300-odd years, this divorce is bound to be very messy.

Whatever the reason for this personal investment, I know exactly where I will be on Thursday night to watch the numbers roll in, followed by the inevitable posturing. Will Prime Minister David Cameron start bawling again? It seems tears, whether of relief or grief, are inevitable. Will Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond, and the leading proponent of independence, call another ?International Press Conference? and seem to go off the rails in the process?

Time will tell on both counts, but the most fascinating aspect of this entire process has been the arguments and machinations on both sides of the divide. There has certainly not been a lack of drama to keep you on your toes. First, the wheels almost irretrievably fell off the ?No? bus in the last televised debate of the campaign. There have been threats from continental Europe that Spain will ultimately thwart the dreams of an independent Scotland from joining the European Union, lest it gives hope, drive and further determination to separatists within their own borders; threats from people associated with the International Olympic Committee that athletes from an independent Scotland would be effectively barred from the 2016 games in Rio; and most damning of all, the revelation that the bulk of Scotland's banks would up sticks to England if the vote goes with the ?Yes? camp, compounding the problem of an independent Scotland not having any confirmed currency as of this writing.

This is without mentioning the opinions for Scots, real and fictional, from Sean Connery to Groundskeeper Willie, coming down for the ?Yes? camp, the latter of whom proudly bears the title of this column on his chest.

There are many factors to weigh in the days ahead for my friends in Scotland, and despite threats there will be no turning back however the outcome, their decision seems relatively straightforward compared to the one Aurora has to make in the next few weeks.

THIS COULD GO ONE OF TWO WAYS

Depending on which way you slice it, Friday was either the height of excitement or resoundingly anticlimactic. After making the decision to hang around Town Hall for the last hour or so of election registration, I anticipated a flood of people coming in at the last minute to jump into the race.

There always seems to be at least one wild card candidate to throw his or her name into the Mayoral ring, not to mention the endless possibilities that could come from the Council race.

Camera at the ready, none of the people who had claimed they were 'seriously considering' putting their names forward, mostly former members of Council, ultimately decided to make the plunge, nor politicians from other levels of government who had been rumoured to have decided to take a municipal run nearly two years ago.

What we ultimately have is a two-man race for Mayor, the first time this has happened in nearly two decades, and a whopping 28 candidates for Council, a new record.

What has struck me since registration opened on January 2 was the amount of new faces that have put themselves forward for consideration. Quite often there are former members of Council in the mix, as well as candidates that were unsuccessful in previous attempts, but that is not the case here.

By my count, all eight incumbents around the Council table that were voted in by residents are seeking re-election. In the best case scenario for these incumbent candidates, only seven have the potential to be left standing with either Geoffrey Dawe or John Gallo knocking each other out, leaving a minimum of two new faces to be elected to the Council table.

Of the remaining candidates, only two of them - Jim Abram and Roy Cohen - are election veterans, both having run in the 2010 election. A further two candidates, Linda Stephens and Mark Etwell, recently vied to be appointed to fill the vacancy left by Chris Ballard this summer, so one could consider them election veterans to a degree as well.

Some of the remaining candidates hit the ground running some time ago, while others have been more quiet, perhaps biding their time until what they feel is just the right moment, but it will be interesting to hear over the coming weeks the issues that inspired them to put themselves forward and how they ultimately hope to stand out in an unexpectedly crowded field.