

BROCK'S BANTER: Bad Education

By Brock Weir

?It's a very ancient saying
?But a true and honest thought
?That if you become a teacher
?By your pupils you'll be taught.?

I found myself whistling the opening lines of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'Getting to Know You', a little ditty from their musical, The King and I, that became something of a standard still sung today, as I left Council Chambers last week.

That song hasn't been in my head for nearly 10 years, since while studying in Ottawa my then part-time job became obsolete due to a Federal election, and one of the perkier members of our now obsolete team insisted on organizing a community sing to bid hale and farewell to the others.

Admittedly, it is a catchy tune, but not necessarily an earworm. So, when those notes passed my lips, they took me a little bit by surprise. After a moment's consideration, however, they seemed pretty apt to sum up the evening's proceedings.

Education was the watchword the previous Tuesday when Council debated the merits (or lack thereof) of the proposed clear bag program.

'Education is key,' said one Councillor on why the program should go forward.

It seems frustrated residents 'frustrated that this program was due to be foisted upon them, but perhaps also frustrated that their opposition was falling on ears turned elsewhere' took this to heart and thoroughly schooled their elected representatives on where their views lay.

Well, at least one resident did.

Approaching lawmakers with a relatively non-obtrusive, small kitchen bag, she whipped out a variety of cardboard, batteries, and a dreaded paint can. As an observer, it was almost like watching Mary Poppins settle into her new digs. One could hardly guess what she was going to pull out of her bag next.

Before the audience discovered if her garbage bag also contained a rubber plant, floor lamp with mysterious electrical supply, a pair of enormous shoes, gilded mirror and a practically perfect tape measure, her point became clear. What she spread out on the table was everything the clear bag program apparently sought to divert from the normal waste streams by giving waste collectors a window into just what was in the bags they were collecting.

But everything laid out before Council came out of a small, opaque bag, an unlimited number of which could be stuffed into a clear bag and thrown outside the door ready to be picked up on your designated garbage day.

To say the program was defanged before our eyes might be an overstatement as many have spent several months pointing out the flaw what I believe was a well-intentioned endeavour, but it is certainly fair to say the wind was taken out of several sails.

For a moment, it seemed all was not for the poor battered, tattered, bloodied and bruised clear bags. Aurora could get the best of both worlds, some argued, by allowing residents to put their garbage out in clear bags if they wanted to. And, if they didn't want to? Well, traditional black bags would have to suffice.

It seemed a reasonable compromise if, of course, you view giving residents the thumbs-up to do something they are already able to do simply by selecting the garbage bag pack of their choice from their nearest retailer a compromise.

Had the suggestion stopped right there, it would likely have gained momentum and everyone would have gone home somewhat satisfied that something had been accomplished after hours and hours of Council debate, not to mention staff time and resources to flesh out the program. Nevertheless, the proverbial record scratch came, allowing everything to grind to a halt when it was suggested by staff that two open houses extolling the virtues of clear bags remain open to residents.

I admire persistence, but there comes a time when you have to throw in the towel.

Municipal staff, consultants, Council members in support of the plan, and even the Deputy Mayor of Markham, who was drafted in at the last minute to make a Hail Mary pass all in the name of transparency on the roadside, did a valiant job in stating their cases. They laid out a comprehensive education program, information was disseminated, and the job was done. But this education, in many cases, only served to bolster community opposition to the plan while concessions made to make the program more palatable only served to make it useless.

Education is always key, but education doesn't necessarily guarantee the results you wanted.

Just ask the backers of New Math and Esperanto.

Aurorans formed educated opinions on a clear bag program, now it is time to focus energies elsewhere.

On the bright side, perhaps now that the Department of Infrastructure and Environmental Services no longer has to worry about a long-range implementation program for the bags, perhaps there will now be enough resources available internally for a project manager for the upcoming Joint Operations Centre.

YES, VIRGINIA. MEN CAN COOK!

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Councillor John Abel for the opportunity to participate in the revived ?Men Can Cook? fundraiser at the Aurora Seniors' Centre last Saturday night.

It was a lot of fun not only being able to go out and prove that the flipside to the fairer sex do indeed know their ways around a kitchen, but can conjure up some pretty tasty dishes to boot.

Service clubs and sports groups were well represented, as were politicians in MPP Chris Ballard, Mayor Geoff Dawe, Councillors Abel, Mrakas, and Thompson, as were Kelvin Brown and Brad Humfries, spouses of MP Lois Brown and Sandra Humfries, respectively.

Flying the flag for the media were Anthony Bell of SNAP'd with maple bacon Brussel sprouts, Neil Moore of the York Region Media Group with maple candied walnut salad (with mango), and me with lemon tarragon chicken (with broccoli).

Evidently the seniors saved lots of room before dining on Saturday and most of us were cleaned out on the first round. After the second serving, us guys got the leftovers. After straggling for a bit, my pickings were relatively slim and I was only able to sample the Mayor's butter chicken, Mr. Brown's minestrone, Mr. Menegakis' spinach roll, Mr. Ballard's pulled pork slider, and a cheddar biscuit I'd venture went with Don Constable's chowder. Thumbs up all around, gentlemen!