

BROCK'S BANTER: Ghosts of Christmases alarmingly present

By Brock Weir

Do you ever emerge from a deep, deep sleep and, due to one circumstance or another, think you have drastically overslept? Oddly enough, this is a feeling recently that is probably a bit more than my fair share.

Last year, for instance, after a particularly long night before, I decided to give myself a treat. There was nothing in particular that needed to be done with great urgency the next morning so I rolled over in the middle of the night and switched the alarm off. I've yet to hear a sweeter sounding click.

That all changed the next morning when, still half asleep, I flipped on the TV only to find the crack team of Regis Philbin and Kathie Lee Gifford staring back at me.

When I turned in the night before, it was sure in the knowledge that Live with Regis & Kathie Lee hadn't been on the air for at least 15 years after Ms. Gifford signed off and replaced with Kelly Ripa. Had I been a betting man, I would have also put money on the idea that Regis himself had retired a few years previously as well.

So, the sight of them through bleary eyes made me momentarily question whether I had been in some sort of deep sleep, coma, or fugue state for the previous 15-odd years or whether my sleep had somehow transcended the time-space continuum.

Then, last week, there was another flash ? this time thanks to my clock radio.

My clock radio is normally set to what my contemporaries has described as ?old fart? music. My argument is so-called ?old fart? music is less jarring to wake up to than the Top 40, but argument went swiftly out the window when it clicked on at 7 a.m., to a full array of Christmas music.

Yes, apparently the early, still unusually balmy days of fall, still not out of Thanksgiving's shadow, were indeed ?the most wonderful time of the year.?

Needless to say, it did not make for the most wonderful of mornings, and getting one's bearings took a few seconds longer than usual.

Since then, the shadow of Christmas itself seems to be taking centre stage everywhere you look.

Hallowe'en is little over two weeks away, but the Christmas deals are flying left and right. Dollar store shelves are groaning under the weight of gift wrap, balls and garlands. Whether you like it or not, everyone seems determined to get into the Christmas spirit ? and Aurora is no exception.

Sure, applications continue to be accepted ahead of next month's Santa Under the Stars Parade, that is relatively small potatoes. Councillor Mrakas, to pick but one example, has offered a grand vision for an outdoor Christmas Market, partly inspired by the wildly successful Christmas Market that has become a hallmark of Toronto's Distillery District.

At first blush, my initial reaction was one of scepticism because his vision was (and remains) one for Library Square and, let's face it, nothing moves swiftly on that stretch of Victoria Street.

A similar venture to Toronto's Christmas Market would naturally mean the buildings on site would have to go, but these concerns were significantly tempered by the Councillor when he said this was a Christmas market that could start small, grow accordingly, and would not necessarily be contingent on the buildings meeting the wrecking ball, as staff hope, sometime this November.

The Christmas Market idea was one which gained the wide support of most of Council, with the one voice of dismay coming from Mayor Geoff Dawe.

?I am supportive of the concept, [but] I am not supportive of the name because, quite frankly, I don't feel it is inclusive,? said Mayor Dawe on an event with the word ?Christmas? in the title. ?I will support the concept, but that is just who I am and how I think.?

From where I sit in the press gallery at Town Hall, I have a perfect view of the north side of the Council table and that night I can say with absolute certainty that there were a few puzzled reactions to that statement, however well intentioned it was.

Admittedly, I could feel my face contorting into a similar state of puzzlement, in spite of myself. There are, after all, several Town-sponsored events associated with holidays stemming from obvious religious tradition from the Easter egg hunt which is literally called an ?Easter Egg Hunt? (Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 31, 2018, while we're on the subject) to the ?Santa Under the Stars? parade whose star attraction is a jolly man in red velvet who works day and night with his elves to deliver Christmas presents.

Inclusion from a religious and secular standpoint is, in my opinion, a noble goal but it can only go so far before it starts to come off as mawkish.

But going in the other direction can have the same effect.

Given last month's conversation over the Christmas Market, my once contorted-and-now-relaxed face experienced a twitch upward in the vicinity of my eyebrows when looking at the agenda for next Tuesday's Council meeting.

On it is a motion from Councillor Harold Kim on the Town's popular annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

?Whereas the Tree Lighting Ceremony, held annually at Town Hall, is well known to be a Christmas Tree; and whereas, when the ceremony began in 2005, the word ?Christmas' was not included for reasons unknown; now therefore be it hereby resolved that the annual ?Tree Lighting Ceremony' be called the ?Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony' beginning with the 2017 Christmas Season,? reads the Councillor's motion.

Now, don't get me wrong; I have in this very space expressed my opinion (contrary, for those keeping score) on those in other municipalities who have moved away from calling a Christmas tree a ?Christmas tree? in favour of the arguably more inclusive ?Holiday Tree.? Call it what you want, but is anyone in any doubt over the roots of a blazing evergreen being firmly in Christmas' camp?

This idea, however well-meaning, simply seems, in my opinion, overkill.

In fact, the very words in this motion point to it stating the obvious in that it is already ?well known to be a Christmas tree.? I don't believe the residents of Aurora need this spelled out for them.

Secondly, the motion states that since its inception 12 years ago, the word ?Christmas? was ?not included for reasons unknown.? Perhaps the reasons have not been explicitly stated, but I don't think it takes the vivid imagination of a MENSA member to figure out the reason.

Thirdly, as the motion states, this annual family tradition has simply been called the ?Tree Lighting Ceremony? from the outset. Had it once been called a ?Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony? and had the C-word lopped off at the behest of overzealous social justice warriors, it might be a different story but, as so many are fond of saying around the Council table, if it ain't broke, why fix it?