

BROCK'S BANTER: Grinding to an icy halt

By Brock Weir

Less than a month ago, I wrote about the ongoing efforts of the Healthy Kids Community challenge to encourage kids, their parents, and, indeed, their whole families, to power off their cell phones just for a little bit here and there to actually reconnect with each other and the world around them.

At the time, it seemed like the very idea of going a day, or even a whole weekend being disconnected from a smart phone, computer or any other type of screen seemed simultaneously liberating and relaxing, but also slightly claustrophobic.

There was that sense of the 'What if'?

What if I miss a breaking news story that needed to be covered in these pages? What if something broke on the international stage? say, inching closer and closer to World War Three? happened when I was disconnected and I was late for the End of the World party?

Then, of course, there is the social media faux pas of missing a milestone in a friend's life, from a birthday, to a job promotion, to something allegedly cute their cat did in the morning and failing to acknowledge its supposed cuteness adequately is tantamount to an affront to not only the entire feline species, but all four-leggers and the humans who love them.

It's a tricky business, and a business that is altogether exhausting. Yet, it is very much a part of our lives.

One of my favourite memories of the last 20 years or so, was the blackout which engulfed much of the eastern seaboard.

We all have our stories of what we did that day? or, in most cases, what we didn't do that day, or into the next.

For many people, it was a hardship. You might not have been able to get where you wanted to go, your evening plans were ruined, your air conditioner was out, your home transformed into a makeshift sauna, your food spoiled, or maybe you had to brainstorm some old, but innovative ways to entertain your kids without the benefit of a boob tube or a fully charged flip phone.

As the kids say today, the struggle was real, but I thought it was particularly fun.

Sure, our house was a sauna, and our chest freezer was a shambles, but, it provided an opportunity to cook said thawed food outside, gather with the neighbours (many of whom we had never met before) have a community cookout and, for the first time in a long while due to light pollution, enjoy the sight of a starry sky.

So, the forecast for horrendous weather this weekend seemed like an opportunity of sorts.

It wouldn't have meant one would need to completely power off the phone, unless the ice took out a cell tower or a power line, thwarting any effort to keep a battery charged, but it seemed like a prime opportunity to take things slower, if only for a day or two. Weekends are all too often punctuated with various obligations? work, personal, and those odd ones that fall in between? and, in light of the forecast, most of these obligations were cancelled or postponed.

There was an unusual sense of freedom that there would be time to do? well, whatever that needed to be done if not for a limited amount of time.

There was, of course, writing that needed to be done, but there were also dozens of books stacking up just begging to be read, there was a PVR full of classic films and a growing backlog of TV shows that needed watching and, more importantly, there was a change of pace that was desperately needed.

We were lucky enough not to lose power for more than a couple of seconds so there was no forced powering off, but there was a feeling of cutting the cord.

And, in that sense, as messy as Monday's cleanup was, I think it was totally worth it.

THE VALUE OF GOOD NEWS

One of the items on my to-do list this weekend that wasn't cancelled or put off was the funeral of my colleague Bill Rea, editor of the Caledon Citizen, who died suddenly on April 8.

Held in Bolton, it was a well-attended service, considering the weather, and one which provided many beautiful remembrances of a life that was cut far too short.

Their words also provided much food for thought on an otherwise quiet weekend.

'Bill was not into social media; he did not Tweet or use Instagram, he walked around with note pads and six, or nine, or 10 pens to make sure one worked, and two cameras,' said a local minister who met with Bill just a few days before his death. 'He talked about getting up incredibly early on Easter Sunday morning. He came to the Great Trail pavilion in Caledon East to take a picture of a gathering for a sunrise service, still pretty early, and he had been elsewhere before that. We exchanged just a few words, he was off

to somewhere else. I went off to breakfast and another church service later, Bill was off to another good news story. Who enjoyed the morning more? Who touched more lives? The clergyman or the roving reporter??

Using Bible scripture to illustrate the idea of approaching a topic from a fresh perspective, he said Bill put himself in the shoes of someone else tirelessly and, in the process, found us stories of new life, unique, hopeful possibilities, places of maturity, triumph over struggle, youthful initiative, new, eager entrepreneurs, tireless volunteers and more, right next door. His writing helped us to think more deeply and oftentimes consider the other side, which we haven't even considered. Bill brought us pictures of beauty we had not noticed, even though it was practically right in front of us. He highlighted those who on their own might not get beyond the back page.?

It was fitting, in my mind, that this hopeful message of an inspiring legacy was being said as ice pellets audibly beat down on the roof of the funeral home, a contrast in perspectives.

After the long trip home, a short distance lengthened by the weather, there was plenty of time to mull this over.

All too often in these days of hyper-connectivity, fake news and clickbait, good news stories take a back seat to the controversial, the bloody, the political, or any combination thereof. But, if a balance isn't struck so much beauty is often missed.

That is a legacy to be proud of and one we can all aspire to within and outside areas of journalism; but sometimes it takes a pause, a break in routine, forced-but-needed downtime, to drive this point home and refocus our perspective.