

BROCK'S BANTER: Victoria's Comeback

By Brock Weir

Whatever you call it, it's come and gone.

Some of you might call it 'the May Long Weekend.' Others, looking forward to cracking open a few cold ones might feel more comfortable with 'May 2-4.' Others still call it 'the official start of summer,' using the word 'official' in its absolute loosest way. In other words, incorrectly.

Indeed, the 'weekend that was' certainly was a long weekend, and chances are if you were determined to open up those 2-4s chilling in your garage, there was nothing stopping you. But, the start of summer?

That would take a significant stretch of the imagination 'official or not.

What was once a weekend to pick up flowers, plant a garden, open a pool, or open a cottage involved a Saturday of intermittent sun, a grey and rainy Saturday and, for the holiday itself, it was a mixed bag.

There was no chance to get in a decent tan and, if you stuck to the principle of 'sun's out, guns out,' your guns were likely dotted with goosebumps as jackets were very much the order of the day.

Well, better luck next time.

I write this on Holiday Monday.

Yet, on this Holiday Monday I am sitting in my office. There is work to be done.

Today, however, I have somebody looking over my shoulder, a set of patrician, beady eyes keeping close watch to make sure I do my work quickly and efficiently.

You see, just last week, I had a surprise visitor. Her name is Julia Jones and throughout my career as a student at Newmarket High School she was following her own career path as a teacher.

Remembering my interest in the Royal Family, she unexpectedly popped in laden down with a package.

Standing at the door, she turned her bundle towards me and there she was. Bordered in an intricate Victorian picture frame was a portrait of the woman who lent her name to the Age.

It was a thoughtful gesture and one which I greatly appreciated but today 'and, again, I reiterate I'm writing this from our office ' I realise I am being supervised by the birthday girl herself.

Swathed from head to toe in heavy black bombazine, punctuated by a lacy white headdress, she is surrounded by her son, the future Edward VII, her grandson, the future George V, and a toddler ' the future Edward VIII, the monarch who ultimately turned out to be the dud.

As my fingers dart back and forth across the keyboard ' and, truth be told, if the portrait were a more exacting depiction of our second-longest reigning monarch ' I'm sure her eyes would be following them back and forth. But, as it is, she's giving me a stony glance.

Is she pleased that I am here doing my duty on her birthday? Unamused that I am not out doing something more celebratory?

The stony expression reveals nothing, clearly prompting my imagination to wander.

So, I present to you this: Let's put the Victoria back in Victoria Day.

As the years go on, I am finding the 'May Long Weekend,' originally set out to be a celebration of all things Vicky ' and, as time went on, a celebration for Bertie, the Eddies, the Georges, and now Liz ' is becoming increasingly Victoria-less. In fact, I can't remember the last time I heard the holiday referred to as Victoria Day in passing conversation, unless it was a 'special' hustle in a TV commercial or a pitch to buy a fire cracker to blow up a few chunks of your back yard or neighbourhood park.

(No, that is not an endorsement of setting off a firecracker in a neighbourhood park. Or a community park, for that matter. That's a thorny issue in Aurora, so I'll just say 'or your local park.' Actually, forget I even said it.)

Each and every year, we receive emails and letters, see lawn signs (snow bank signs), billboards, and many other forms of communication reminding us that we should 'Keep the Christ in Christmas.' The fact that these same people don't call for a rabbit cull every Easter to keep people on the straight and narrow doesn't seem to be part of this conversation, but they are nevertheless vehement in their message.

Perhaps it is time to be as vehement for poor, neglected Victoria.

Sure, Victoria is well-remembered today.

Victoria Hall, for instance, continues to be part of our great municipal conversation these days as Council members consider options for tacking an addition onto its rear end as part of the redevelopment of Library Square which happens, fittingly, to be on Victoria

Street. And neither one of these landmarks were named after Misses Beckham or Principal.

Just a stone's throw away, we have the Church Street School, another subject for extension, designed in a style reflective of the Birthday Girl becoming Empress of India and then, a further short jog to the south, is Connaught Avenue, named after her son Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, later Governor General of Canada.

She is the subject of a hit ? yet surprisingly dull ? hit ITV-PBS that shares her name and a community gathering was held just off John West Way at Diamond Jubilee Park to mark the day her great-great granddaughter, Elizabeth II, made her eat dust on her way to the top spot of longest-reigning monarch.

But, with Elizabeth II sitting comfortably in top position, and some seeing Victoria Hall as a quaint relic of our historical past, Connaught (now Connacht) simply a province of the Republic of Ireland and the architecture of the Church Street School building a possible relic of Britain's colonial past that is best not discussed in polite company.

And where go these legacies so too seems Victoria. And that, I think, is a shame.

She still has name recognition, her very name has become a byword for many things, and her image, whether head-on in portrait, a profile in coin, or a silhouette in clip art, is instantly recognizable. Those, in themselves, is more than can be said for Lt. Gov. John Graves Simcoe and his namesake Simcoe Day. Simcoe, despite so many locations here in Aurora and across the Province bearing his name, not to mention being a key character on the AMC TV series Turn: Washington's Spies, has been cast aside for the antiseptic and decidedly less catchy ?Civic Holiday? in August.

For nearly 64 years, Victoria was a rock of stability around these parts and, if you happened to have needed a jacket or hat this past weekend, it is certainly more than can be said for Mother Nature and your ?2-4 Weekend.?

Let the girl have her moment again.

(Editor's Note: In a first for The Auroran, the editor is writing an editor's note to the editor's piece. He is well aware that Victoria Day is the monarch's Official Birthday in Canada)