

BROCK'S BANTER: Adventure: Chosen. Choose yours.

By Brock Weir

I can still feel the road salt under my feet.

Every step, every crunch took me closer to what I was sure was going to be a land of enchantment.

I climbed the steps, opened the door, and, like the best Choose Your Own Adventure stories, I faced a fork in the road. I could have either gone straight ahead to what looked to be somewhat promising, or descend the next set of steps to delve deeper into the mystery.

Perhaps not feeling as daring as some of my fellow five-year-olds, I went straight ahead, and what I found confirmed I had made the right decision.

I was in a haven. There were rows upon rows of people, places and things waiting to be explored and, yes, I was indeed enchanted. However, what I remember catching my fancy the most were seemingly huge boxes bearing a host of familiar faces.

If my mind's eye serves ? and, yes, I will be dating myself with each word that follows ? these lovely boxes were film projection reels each containing one episode of Road to Avonlea, which was still in its first run on CBC.

This was, to my memory, my very first visit to a public library and although I remember little more of those formative steps after my eyes set upon the faces of Sarah Polley and Jackie Burroughs, it was evidently an incredible experience that lit a candle within me that has been burning bright ever since.

The scene was the Newmarket Public Library, but it was still a year or two before I first set foot in the Aurora Public Library, when it was housed on Victoria Street.

It was infinitely better weather. The only thing crunching underfoot was a bit of gravel off to the side of the main pathway. I can't remember what I checked out on that occasion, but distinctly remember getting assigned a plastic white and red library card. The librarian whipped out a red Sharpie to add an extra dot next to my bar code; whether that dot designated me a young'un or an out-of-towner, I can't remember, but I carried the card with pride.

From that point on, I was a regular patron of both libraries, often only checking out books rather than film reels or those newfangled VHS tapes all the kids were talking about.

Since then I have watched our libraries grow from strength to strength not only in their facilities and collections, but how they continue to evolve to serve our community's needs.

In Aurora's case, it seems this transformation has been quite ahead of the curve.

Over the eight-or-so years I have been with The Auroran, I have seen ? as we all have ? the shift from the traditional library model with books on just about any conceivable subject, a bank of computers and some space for let, into a veritable destination.

It is still a place to come and learn, find a volume to help you unravel the mysteries of the universe or that perfect mystery to snuggle up with as our nights become cooler and cooler.

It is still a place where you can check out the latest movie without buying blind on Amazon and ending up with a stinker.

It is still a place where you can come in to access the internet if, for whatever reason, you cannot do so from the comforts of your own home or the palm of your hand.

And it is still a place to come and find a quiet place to be alone with your own thoughts on how to conquer the world.

But it has become so much more than that.

It's an art gallery, a gathering place, an entrepreneurial incubator, and a place where creativity abounds beyond the weathered endpapers of the hardback. And, most importantly in my view, it has become an increasingly valuable forum for the important topics that need to be discussed.

You don't have to look too far back too to come up with a multitude of examples.

International Women's Day, for instance, has been marked with roundtable discussions on the rights of women at home and abroad. It was not hard, following the discussion, to get feedback indicating eyes had been opened to challenges facing women right here in home, previously unfathomable, perhaps to some even an inconvenient truth.

A similar event held earlier this year on a myriad of Indigenous issues spurred increasingly fruitful discussion as Indigenous leaders from our own community and from further afield throughout Southern Ontario presented their unvarnished realities to a largely non-Indigenous audience.

Topics might have been uncomfortable for some, but there is nothing wrong with that. Many of us have been far too comfortable for far too long. Discussion were heated at times, peppered with a splash of a colonial hangover in one lengthy debate, and an

unexpected segue into the tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women facilitated by someone in the audience who just happened to be at the forefront of the fight.

No matter how you came into either of these events as a spectator, even if you crossed the threshold with a closed mind, there is little doubt you left with your eyes opened with plenty to talk about once you got home or got into work the following morning. As such, I was honoured over the summer to be invited to be a part of this ongoing conversation to host an In Conversation event at the Library this Wednesday, September 20, beginning at 7 p.m. focusing on celebration and challenges facing our LGBTQ+ community.

You might think this is a shameless plug ? and, I suppose, in some ways it is ? but the truth is, I accepted the invitation with some degree of trepidation.

The previous outings have set the bar so high and facilitated such a valuable discussion that is difficult not to feel a little bit nervous because these outings, in the end, are only as good as the audience.

The Aurora Public Library deserves all the kudos for having the courage to tackle these often thorny issues head-on and offering out-of-the-box programming that meets the needs of the increasingly diverse community in which it operates.

In each of these topics, however, there is a universality.

Regardless of your gender, sexuality, ethnic background or income level, the issues of women, Indigenous peoples, refugees, and, now, the LGBTQ+ community, affect each and every one of us. They are altogether human issues, part of the human tapestry, and one stitch that goes awry can lead to the unravelling of the tightest of bonds.

Come and be a part of the discussion, your discussion, and if, to this point, you have only been popping by the yellow-brick building at the corner of Yonge and Church in recent months to check out your latest beach read, come and experience the Library from a new and innovative perspective.