

BROCK'S BANTER: Clearing Smoke

By Brock Weir

With the smoke just starting to clear in St. Peter's Square, I kept at least one eye firmly planted on Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church as the word waited to hear the name of the man stepping forward to fill Benedict XVI's snappy red loafers.

I am not speaking figuratively, actually. It was not yet 30 minutes after the white smoke made its way out of the Sistine Chapel than I had an appointment to meet with Mary Beth Hess, at Horton Place, her family home.

Aside from a pretty decent night's sleep, interrupted by only one false alarm sounded by my family around 6.30 that morning as the anchors of Breakfast Television debated the shade of the first smoke signal of the day, I was ready to settle in for Wednesday's TV coverage.

Unfortunately, the Cardinals took the most inopportune moment to reach their divine conclusion, so as the speculation over who inspired the white smoke took off around the world, it was off to Horton Place.

There, it was convenient to keep one eye on Aurora's local Catholic church directly across the street. In hindsight, I am not entirely sure what I was expecting to see. Heck, it didn't seem likely that every Catholic in the community would drop whatever they happened to be doing to converge on their place of worship to celebrate their new shepherd.

As one bearded man approached the church, I got a little bit intrigued, but after proceeding up the steps, rattling the apparently locked door a couple of times, he made a call on his cell phone and went on his not-so-merry way.

By the time we had left, it was now apparent that the chosen one was Argentina's Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, who may or may not be taking the name of Francis, but that was soon confirmed. I am not going to lie and say I wasn't rooting for Cardinal Ouellet. Patriotism notwithstanding, although I was personally wary of some of the more conservative ideologies his detractors insisted he had, his interview with Peter Mansbridge the previous week indicated he wasn't afraid to tackle the tough issues rather than deny they were challenges to be faced.

His convictions on these issues may not be popular the world-over, but they were just that.

Who in our section of the Americas, however, knew anything about the Cardinal-formerly-known-as-Bergoglio?

As soon as he stepped out onto the balcony of St. Peter's, however, it was clear there was something about this man that was very different from his predecessor. It may have been the mildly petrified look on his face when he was confronted with the sea of humanity out there to celebrate his election.

It may have been his ready smile once he had soaked up the scene, or the informal way in which he addressed the world thereafter.

All evidence indicates the crowd ate it up and there may have been a sense of relief in the selection. After all, he seemed like a good guy and one of the people. He did, of course, compound this sense by hopping on the bus with the other cardinals, checking out of his hotel, and then making a great save on what could have been a disastrous tumble the following day.

Of course, the road has already started to get rocky with allegations over his alleged involvement with the Argentinian Junta and some of his clashes with their current president and her predecessor/late husband, but it will be interesting to see how his papacy turns out.

Those who hoping for a sea change in wanting a more liberal view towards abortion, equal marriage, gay adoption, and the role of women in the church may have been hoping for too much too soon. His stance towards contraception, however, may be an

indication that 'baby steps' need to be taken before these ideas, embraced by so many people in society and in more liberal quarters of the church, have a chance to come even close to the norm.

If the reaction among youth to Pope Francis, however, is any indication ? and he has been identified as 'humble?', a 'man of the people?', while also drawing comparisons to some of his more revered predecessors ? perhaps he can attract the right people back to the church to make this future a reality.

TWO WORDS OF THANKS

First, I would like to thank Father Tim Hanley for inviting me to Our Lady of Grace's Sunday services and for being welcomed by the congregation on March 17. Secondly, this is the final edition of Senior Scape written by Sylvia Dickens as she takes time to tackle other writing challenges.

Sylvia took over writing Senior Scape from Brian Warburton nearly a year ago and brought her own special vibrancy to the column. Although she has lived and worked all over Ontario as a journalist, settling in Aurora was something of a homecoming for the one-time student of Wells Street Public School. With an extensive career in community newspapers, Sylvia brought a keen and colourful eye to the vibrant life over at the Seniors Centre. I wish her the best of luck in her future endeavours ? and judging by her column, she certainly has a full plate!