

BROCK'S BANTER: Grand Slams

By Brock Weir

At the risk of sounding like one of those typical, 'get off my lawn'-type people who think that everything was rosier in their formative years in comparison to today's supposed slippery slope into rack and ruin, I sometimes worry about this up and coming generation.

There, I said it.

It's not so much that I think my childhood heyday of the late 80s and the 1990s was anything special or out of the ordinary to reminisce over. Certainly not. I haven't fully jumped on board, for instance, with the current nostalgia bandwagon that has seen such television shows like *Will & Grace*, *Full House*, and the ill-fated *Roseanne* revived for a new generation. (Although, in the interests of full disclosure, I am more than just a little bit excited for the *Murphy Brown* reboot, as I think it will be particularly relevant in today's political climate).

Nor am I inclined to revisit my ill-advised days of sporting a rat tail, or of moving through the halls of my office wearing Hypercolor everything, as I did through elementary school, thinking I was too cool for?.well, school.

It's the simpler pleasures today's generation is missing. Think of the unique and singular sensation of slamming down the phone receiver back onto its cradle. If you still have a land line in your house, they might still have a chance. But, if your phone is one of those newfangled portable devices, we've got a problem.

In my experience, the strength in which one used to slam the receiver back down on its cradle was in direct correlation to whatever nonsense you heard coming out of the business end of things.

If you were listening for a few minutes to a telemarketer telling you that 'you may have already won,' a rather half-hearted slam might follow. If it was a family squabble, a couples' quarrel, or something that could actually impact your life in a tangible way, chances are the slam might be firmer and more decisive.

And, if you slammed the phone down hard enough, you could hear the bells tinkle ever so slightly from inside the works. Depending on the conversation you just had, sometimes those faint peals were a balm for the soul.

Sometimes slamming it down wasn't enough. If you really wanted a breather from someone, you could simply place the receiver down beside the phone for as long as you wished, and peace would reign until you got over it and put the receiver back where it belongs.

The beauty of the system was that it was impermanent and carried with it minimal damage.

By the time you cooled off, you could replace the receiver, thus opening back up the conduits of communication.

Nowadays, all this can be done with the wave of a finger, whether you're lightly touching the End Call button on your phone, or doing away with a conversation ? or potential conversations ? on social media platforms like Facebook with a simple click or tap. From standing on what some might consider just a little bit in from the sidelines, this appears to be happening with increasing ? and alarming ? frequency.

The maddening part of it is that it can be done so swiftly, barely allowing any time for any party involved in a verbal disagreement to pinpoint exactly where things went off the proverbial rails.

You can't figure out exactly what you said that set someone off, thus leaving room for all around ignorance and, perhaps worse, not being able to take some pride in yourself for sticking to your guns on an issue ? whatever the issue happens to be.

In our fraught political climate ? and, in this case, I am not just talking about endless debates on the whys and wherefores of what is going down in our neighbours to the south; we have, after all, just put a provincial election to bed, a municipal election is just warming up, and there is speculation of a snap Federal election this fall ? these situations are becoming a regular part of day to day life.

Personally, I don't see the value of it.

People have come up to me complaining about being blocked by one person or another, that their views are not being allowed to stand in the social media forum of their choice, that splinter groups have been formed because they were either blocked by a politically-minded administrator or disagreed with the direction he or she was taking a group.

In very few of these cases do I ever get an indication that there has been dialogue between the parties in question on just why things have shaken down the way they have.

But, the beat goes on.

I'm not immune to this. Over the course of my time on social media ? and, admittedly, I was a holdout for quite some time ? I think,

and I could be wrong, that I have only been blocked by four people on social media. In two of the four cases, the reason for blocking were clear, if not unlikely ? in the first case, I disagreed with someone over a news story about Faye Dunaway and, in the second, I questioned the sincerity of Roseanne Barr's tearful apology after her most recent show was cancelled following a string of racist tweets.

The other two cases, I have no idea. Both were political aspirants who gave me no indication of any kind of disagreement. Thus, all of us were deprived of a learning opportunity.

I've always been perplexed by people who use social media in the mistaken belief that it is an echo chamber, hoping that whatever they put out there will be greeted with nothing short of universal agreement.

Putting something into the public domain in any way is an invitation for dialogue and this, in my view, is always a positive. You might disagree, but ongoing conversation can often foster a new perspective. Of course, swaying someone by the sheer persuasiveness of your argument is becoming an equally rare animal these days, but it never hurts to try.

What hurts is shutting these ideas out and dismissing any chance of an intellectual or philosophical dialogue. Have we, as a people, reached a turning point where that is no longer desired or even possible? I hope not. As the municipal election heats up and the gears begin grinding on whatever is on the Federal horizon, this is only going to become more problematic with each passing week.

If only opening up the lines of communication was still as simple as putting the phone back on the hook.