

BROCK'S BANTER: Keeping House in 2018

By Brock Weir

There is always something exciting about the beginning of a New Year.

Many people feel this way, but I know there are many still who either mourn the loss of the year that was ? for whatever reason most personal to them ? or treat the dawn of a new year as just another day among the 364 or so that came before and the 365 still to come.

While I always find something to get excited about when the day arrives, increasingly I find myself wavering between the two polls. It is not a matter of getting older and the knowledge that one year down is, well, another year down; rather it is the knowledge that no matter what the ending year has wrought, there is still a significant unknown to contend with each day ahead.

2017 might have been a wonderful year for you from a personal perspective, one filled with unique joys and singular milestones you will hold close to your heart for many years ahead, I think it is a fair bet to say that, from the wider perspective at least, there were many people eager to close that particular chapter and move onto something fresh and new.

It was a year of turmoil in so many parts of the world, including nations close to home, where uncertainty and anxiety was the order of the day and, in cases for so many, uncertainty and anxiety bolstered by new waves of hatred, violence and bigotry.

This was something brought home to me in an unexpected venue in the lead up to the New Year, namely the Queen's Christmas Message.

In a broadcast that often focuses on the Christian message of the holiday, the Queen this time spent a significant amount of time focusing on various instances of hate and tragedy that, sadly, dominated many of the headlines this past year, including the terror attack in Manchester, where dozens were killed or injured at something as innocuous as an Ariana Grande concert, as well as the unspeakable tragedy of the Grenfell Tower disaster.

There were also natural disasters touched upon, including hurricanes that decimated significant swaths of the Caribbean, and all but wiping the island of Barbuda off the map.

?We think of our homes as places of warmth, familiarity and love ? of shared stories and memories ? which is perhaps why, at this time of year, so many return to where they grew up,? said the Queen. ?There is a timeless simplicity to the pull of home. For many, the idea of home reaches beyond a physical building, to a home town or city.

?We expect our homes to be places of safety ? sanctuary, even ? which makes it all the more shocking when the comfort they provide is shattered. Today, we celebrate Christmas, which, itself, is sometimes described as a festival of the home. Families travel long distances to be together. Volunteers and charities, as well as many churches, arrange meals for the homeless, and those who would otherwise be alone on Christmas Day.?

It was a message that evidently struck home for a lot of people, sparking much praise throughout social media and ultimately winning a coveted ratings war on British television that week, and while I too thought it was a particularly striking ? and strikingly personal ? message from our Head of State, there was one particular passage that stuck with me well into the New Year.

And, at the risk of being repetitive, I will throw caution to the wind and repeat it below:

?There is a timeless simplicity to the pull of home. For many, the idea of home reaches beyond a physical building, to a home town or a city.?

I think we see ample evidence of this in action every single day, whether they are the people who did indeed spend their Christmas and holiday season volunteering to help others, whether serving up a delicious holiday meal for those without the means to provide one for themselves, spearheading clothing drives or charity sales to help fund initiatives that will reap benefits throughout this year, or simply providing fellowship to their fellow man or woman who would otherwise be experiencing, for various reasons, dreadful isolation.

This sense of home reaching out before the four walls of our particular house, apartment or room is something I am seeing increasingly evident among the people I speak to. For many of my acquaintances this is being spurred in no small part in response to the present turmoil in the United States and the determination that such tides should not spill over onto the north side of the boarder. There is a growing sense, in my observation, that people are once again becoming conscious that their vote matters and can, in the end, truly help shape their home, however they define it.

If this happens to be a movement that is wider-spread than just my circle, I will be interested to see how it comes to define this year. As a whole, we have plenty of opportunities this year to keep house ? or, depending on your point of view, clean house ? and help shape it to what we want it to be.

The first opportunity to do some housekeeping is likely to be this June when the writ is expected to be dropped for the 2018 Provincial Election, the make or break campaign for Premier Kathleen Wynne and her governing Liberal Party as well as Progressive Conservative challenger Patrick Brown and his slate of candidates looking to unseat the majority government. Both have presented very different visions for the Province and how it should be run ? and they will, of course, continue to do so ? but it is your responsibility to sit up, pay attention and make a firm decision on what you want your house to look like for the next four years. Battle lines have already been drawn and there are clear issues that will likely make this an interesting fight to the end ? minimum wage and hydro prices being two examples ? but fatigue with the longevity of the Governing party shouldn't be reason alone to cast your vote. An informed decision is a good decision, whichever colour you bleed.

Closer to home, we have another municipal election upon us.

While the Provincial election will cover the broadstrokes, the municipal election covers most of the nitty-gritty that occurs right in your back yard.

While jockeying for position has been taking place practically since the last the end of the 2014 campaign, it is incumbent on each and every one of us to separate vision from bluster and make informed decisions on how we want our community, our home, to be shaped over the year ahead.