

BROCK'S BANTER: Late Arrivals

By Brock Weir

"This is the 90s. Why does it look like 1986?" asked Marshall, as they viewed an old music video of a Canadian one-hit-wonder through the wonders of YouTube.

"The 80s didn't come to Canada till, like, '93," replied Robin, the one-time teen sensation whose single, "Let's Go To The Mall" apparently took Canada - or, at least, a few of our country's larger malls - by storm one crazy summer after Canada 125.

This scene from CBS's comedy "How I Met Your Mother" originally aired in 2006, but it struck a definite chord with me on the first viewing for its sheer honesty.

Growing up in that time, it always seemed like we, as Canadians, were slightly behind the times when it came to our American cousins, whether it was adopting the latest fashion fads or finding our own home-grown pop culture equivalents to what was once the latest thing in the States.

This even extended into our corporate culture, where once-popular Canadian brands were seen as "less than" and increasingly so - which each new innovation launched by their American counterparts.

We have seen that so many times it is almost pointless to count, but let's look at a few examples.

For those of a certain age, perhaps the most relatable example is the Sears catalogue which always seemed to fall just a little bit short in terms of sheer variety when compared with options south of the border.

More recently, there was that collective national realisation that the offerings of Tim Hortons, Country Style, and a host of other outlets just weren't cutting it when news started to rumble that the legendarily exotic Krispy Kreme was looking to make northern inroads.

Anticipation reached fever pitch when those inroads were finally borne to fruition. The opening of each outlet was a media event, crowds were lined up around the block and those close enough to the window were having religious, and possibly erotic experiences watching that glaze drizzle onto each and every donut rolling off the assembly line.

And who can forget the palpitations Canadian consumers experienced as soon as the American discount chain Target announced it was hopping the border. As soon as they announced their intentions, a national outpouring of scorn towards our own brands became very fashionable, as were fictitious claims from Canadian consumers that Target was something for years - nay, decades - they had been clamouring.

Again, the opening of each Target location - including the one here in Aurora - was another media event (guilty) with photos and live videos of the opening day line-ups coming in the first half of that week's newspaper or that night's media broadcast.

This sense that the grass was always greener once seemed to be confined to our shopping habits and pop culture tastes.

After all, we, as Canadians, almost collectively looked on at our American cousins with a smug sense of both superiority and dismay as voters took a match to the dumpster that was their political landscape.

Admittedly, they faced a tough choice.

In the one corner was a highly qualified, experienced woman, who had dedicated her life to public service, prepared to carry on the legacy that had been created and developed by her predecessors.

In the other corner was the scion of a family business empire whose political experience was largely confined to flirtations with politics, teasers on just what position and party he would ultimately grace with his golden touch.

Despite his obvious wealth, he somehow tapped into a sense of anger, of disenfranchisement, a frustration with the so-called elites he pledged to bring down, despite being an entrenched member of the "elite" himself.

As we know, it was a winning formula, with the latter eventually pipping the former to the post - well, technically speaking. She might have won the popular vote, but, in a complex, convoluted, and, to some, inexplicably complicated weighting system, he ultimately took home the grand prize.

It's not that he represented what the American people stand for, or ultimately need. Rather, he positioned himself as a saviour, one that would deliver them from whatever forces - real or fictional - that were allegedly keeping them down, apparently keeping them from, in Oprah parlance, realising their best life. Whether he has delivered - or ultimately will deliver - on those high expectations is immaterial.

It is, in this case, all about the personality, brand mottos, and the sure belief that he will ultimately meet expectations - but, if not, it is anyone else's fault but his.

We looked on that situation as if we were watching our own neighbours' house burning down. Keeping a keen eye on the fire to

make sure the flames didn't spread to our own house and, at the same time, remaining thankful that it is not us, just hoping nobody gets hurt in the process.

We couldn't imagine a world where politics could be so dictated by personality, a world where votes would be too close to call, too convoluted to break down into an infographic, and spur discussions that would belie the tenets of our Canadian identity.

I wonder how many still feel that way.

If it once took 13 years for the 80s to fully take root in Canada, things may have accelerated in recent years.

At this point, however, it is, for many, only a flirtation but it will be interesting (to pick the most benign adjective available) to see how things progress.

As Kathleen Wynne said on Sunday, we have all seen this movie before. And, for the perspective of many who watched what unfolded Saturday, we just might be joining the movie already in progress.

We might not know how the movie will end in the United States, but do we really have all that far to look?

Sears is shuttered, Krispy Kreme outlets have been retrofitted into dollar stores and shawarma houses, and Target completely missed the bullseye ? gone from Canada whence it came, many stores now filled with the resurgent Canadian Tire.

Maybe it's time to start the countdown.