

BROCK'S BANTER: London Pride

By Brock Weir

I am writing this week's installment of Brock's Banter just after the twilight hours of Wednesday morning.

Having set my alarm a little bit early to watch the goings-on in London as they carried out Margaret Thatcher's funeral, I started off the day a bit bleary-eyed but very curious as to how things would shake down. Given the wide ranging emotions that have been bubbling to the surface since she died on April 8, I was fully prepared for everything ranging from mass anarchy in the streets over ?Milk Snatcher? to people genuflecting as the cortege passed by in memory of their hero. And everything in between.

After Thatcher's death, more fascinating than the retrospectives of her public service and her impact on the world ? love her or loathe her ? have been the extremely divisive reactions her legacy has been conjuring up.

My Facebook feed, for instance, almost immediately exploded with people either praising her as a trail blazer (Yes.), a feminist icon (Seriously? Read up on that.), a bastion of freedom (Okay.), the aforementioned ?Milk Snatcher? or an overall harridan of the 20th century.

Without mentioning some of the more vulgar analogies made when people talk about opinions, suffice it to say that everybody had them and were expressing them with an almost unprecedented amount of enthusiasm.

These opinions grew louder as initial comments left to debate and eventually egging on their British friends in their efforts to make ?Ding Dong The Witch Is Dead? rise to the top of the British charts. Then conservative friends, neo-con acquaintances, and those who subscribe to the ?ignorance is bliss? school of thought, however, started getting the vapours at the shenanigans unfolding right before their very eyes?or simply feigning outrage at the very least simply to be contrarian. I think we all know people like that.

Needless to say, many people who were heretofore disengaged in civic affairs and disinterested in raising their voices, suddenly found them again and were exercising their vocal cords in a way which probably left their nearest and dearest absolutely dumbfounded.

Thatcher's place in history is secured, but her legacy will be debated for decades. While I'm sure I was not alone in rolling my eyes at some of these antics, particularly euphoric reactions her death conjured up in those who weren't yet alive until well after her imposed retirement, perhaps her parting gift to the world was galvanizing people to exercise the freedoms she advocated.

While I waited for today's spectacle-that-wasn't, I thought while some of the reactions in London and around the world had been rather extreme in some cases, it was reassuring that there are still certain things in the highly industrialised world that can stimulate people to speak up.

Our columnists ? including myself ? have not been alone in bemoaning a certain level of disinterest apparent among many Aurorans when it comes to the very issues that immediately affect their lives. Case in point was this year's budget talks.

Councillors commented on the strange lack of company in the chambers during these debates. More recently, comments have been raised over the effectiveness of some municipal surveys, which often have a hard time breaking 100 when it comes to feedback received, unless it is something which seems to invariably get their dander up, such as traffic calming in Aurora's Northeast Quadrant or tinkering with the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Perhaps the best example of this occurred just over a month ago when two public meetings were held on the same night. The first was a brainstorming session on how to revitalize downtown business and commerce in Aurora as a whole, while the second looked at the future of Library Square. The first was very well attended, a testament to the fact this is a segment of the community that is galvanized ? and has always been so ? to get something done. The other, was a sparsely attended meeting of approximately 20, five

of which were those familiar faces from the budget meetings.

There could be a further example if Councillors opt to delay their approval of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park pending further public input. Given the length of time it takes to get that type of thing done, it might be wise to have Platinum Jubilee Park plan ready to go too!

I often wonder if it is time for Council and Town Staff to consider recalibrating what they do to meet the demands of the community. They're slated to sign off on a plan which would take the first steps in forming a review of the level of services provided to residents with the tax dollar.

While clearly in favour of the public having the greatest possible amount of public input, if recent examples are any indication, whether or not the public feels the same way could be the question at hand.

If the trend continues, and if five valiant souls who slogged through the budget meetings with the rest of us dwindle, is it truly reflection of public disinterest and disengagement, or a sign members of the public are content to let the people they elected to represent their interest at the Council table do exactly that, rather than putting off making many of the harder decisions by dipping back to the public well for input that is not going to come?