

BROCK'S BANTER: MEET CHARLIE

By Brock Weir

Many of us are brought up with the philosophy of turning the other cheek.

It is not a matter of burying one's

head in the sand when you see

something on the horizon which might seem, at the outset, best avoided, or simply ignoring a wrong you have the power to make right; rather, the philosophy extends to not feeding oxygen to the attention seekers hell bent on disrupting our lives in various ways. Today, in our new, modern internet parlance, it might be called 'feeding the troll', but it is an adage that people all too often forget when taking action.

We have seen it locally when litigation called national attention to an online publication with a very niche following. We have seen it provincially and nationally when politicians deny, deny, deny - and very publically, too - allegations made by one individual no one has ever heard of, thus broadcasting said allegations to the wider world, keeping the chestnut 'Where there's smoke there's fire' primed and ready to go at a moment's notice.

As we have seen over the last week, however, sometimes this way of thinking can get caught up in very tragic circumstances.

Consider the terrorist situation in Paris which continues to grip the world. The massacre of 12 individuals at the Parisian headquarters of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, followed by the terror attacks in other parts of France over the next few days, has led to an outpouring of international reaction.

Few will forget the endless streams of people marching throughout France on Sunday, citizens at large, political friend and foe alike, in solidarity not just with the French people, but with a way of life that so many nations around the world hold dear, and many might take for granted.

Before last Wednesday's tragedy, I wonder how many people outside of the media, or maybe even political junkies, had the vaguest idea what Charlie Hebdo is or what it stands for. There might have been a blip on our collective radar screens in 2006 when controversies arose in early 2006 when the newspaper printed cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad. Their publication in the newspaper, along with similar cartoons elsewhere in the world, stoked widespread condemnation from the Muslim community. A few years later, their offices were firebombed after further publications, culminating in last week's massacre.

If the intent of attacks was to silence such editorial freedom, it might not have been the wisest move. In the hours and days following the attack, those who did not know about Charlie Hebdo became a rare breed. Almost immediately - and as depicted above - 'Je suis Charlie' became a motto adopted by people from all corners of the world interested in protecting democratic freedoms.

Not only did people now know Charlie, they have come to be Charlie. Charlie is now a way of life and Charlie is stronger than ever. On a personal level, since last Wednesday's attacks I feel almost as though I am looking at art - and, I know, what one man calls art could be called by another man - well, something on the opposite spectrum of art - with a renewed lens.

Browsing the paintings, sketches, and other art forms created by students from Aurora's two Catholic high schools which currently adorn the walls of the Aurora Cultural Centre, it is clear that these are students who are uninhibited, encouraged to hold nothing back while expressing themselves on paper, canvas, or other media. There is a joy from the students that jumps off the walls, the joy that comes with the freedom of expression, and a joy which should be celebrated. I look forward to seeing what the students from Aurora High School and Dr. G.W. Williams High School have in store for us when they install their works next week.

Art - whether it is visual, musical or dramatic - has the unique power to tap into the human experience, but I think the events of the last week have only served to bolster this force. Editorial cartoons, on the other hand, have always had the power to inflame passions, as they should. It is a very unique medium that has the ability to tap directly, and immediately, into the issues of the day and strike while the iron is hot, so to speak.

Over the last few days, my mind goes back to the summer of 2011 when the Centre hosted a travelling exhibition of editorial cartoons, some controversial, others more pedestrian. Visitors to the gallery were invited to grab a white index card, along with a pen or a couple of crayons to create their own ideas of what an editorial cartoon should be. Unfortunately, I can't tell you what most of them were, but there was one which has stuck with me since then - and likely will for years to come.

Created just days after the 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway which let nearly 80 dead in separate attacks in Oslo and on a nearby summer camp on the island of Utøya, it depicted a freehand shoreline dotted with trees with an island in the middle.

Scattered over the island and into the nearby water were 77 drops of red ink, one dot for each life lost.

The simple title? 'Loss of Innocence.'

I wonder where that anonymous artist is today and how they would interpret Wednesday's attacks.
Chances are, he or she is Charlie too.