

BROCK'S BANTER: On Being Present

By Brock Weir

Patience has never been one of my virtues.

Perhaps it's a hazard of the job, but sometimes the speed in which it takes to get some things done can be absolutely maddening. Maybe it is also a hazard of age.

By some people's estimation, I am a millennial. In other people's eyes, I made my debut in the world just a year or two before that apparently dreaded demographic. But, I am on that cusp of a generation that learned the intricacies of the internet from a very early age, yet I am also of the generation that does have a healthy memory of life before it.

I had to chuckle last week at an event held to commemorate Transgender Day of Remembrance when the twenty-something Benjamin took to the stage to discuss their transition, including how they told their family.

"I wanted to write my parents a letter, but I also wanted the instant gratification knowing that it got to them, so I emailed them because we're millennials and we need instant gratification," said Benjamin. "It was a pretty in-depth email. I even sent it to a few friends who were out closer to me [to make sure I said it right]."

Gratification was somewhat instantaneous, receiving a warm response from one branch of their family tree within 20 minutes.

Benjamin's mission was accomplished, but it is a mission that is shared by so many of their "our" generation. When we put something out into the world, we all too often want that immediate reaction, whether it is a "like" on Facebook or Instagram, a retweet, or whatever social media platform happens to be part of this conversation. It has made us want a faster clip out of life.

Benjamin's family saw this manifest itself in a highly personal way, but we see it all around us. If you're out to dinner with any group of people larger than a couple, chances are you've had to put that first savoury bite on hold while someone whips out their phone to take a picture of the beautifully presented plate "for the Gram."

Or, maybe you've been nudged out of the way at an event so someone can perfectly frame whatever is before you for a livestream on their platform of choice.

Or, perhaps you've been so engrossed the small circle around you that you've taken absolutely no notice of the bigger, slightly more deliberately-paced big picture surrounding you.

Once upon a time, these were fairly innocuous phenomena but increasingly I am seeing this take away from the experience of the rest of the people in the room.

Two events this fall have really underscored this from my perspective.

The first was Dancing with the Easter Seals Stars held this past October. Having attended all four of its previous incarnations, it is an event that started out with a great deal of buzz. Attendees knew what the event was about, were conscious of the cause they were there to support, and were appreciative of the of the fancy, arch-breaking footwork the local celebs had put alongside their dance instructors to make the event a rousing success.

This year was different, however. Smartphones were once again the order of their day, but what set this year apart from the rest was a seemingly significant disinterest in what was happening on the dance floor, and even less interest with what the judges had to say. Even from close range, it was hard to hear anything above the cacophony of the individual conversations and moment-captures happening at each respective table.

It was more of the same on Remembrance Day afternoon when the local legion hosted a large live band from a local private school who worked tirelessly to prepare a rousing program of entertainment that spanned the decades from the First and Second World Wars to the latest episodes in the Star Wars saga.

Sitting near the front of the audience, it was easy to hear that their hard work had indeed paid off, but I think it is a safe assumption that most of this was lost on the people creating another kind of din behind me, huddling in small groups, boisterously backslapping their friends and peers, and otherwise creating their own moments to the expense of the big one, and getting that instant gratification of shooting their experiences out into the vast realm of the online world, tapping and refreshing, waiting for those likes to roll in.

These experiences are just two more observations I've noted that have made me try to put in a more concerted effort to "to borrow a phrase from our post-Oprah self-help universe" be present and, despite my impatience, just roll with the moment.

And, if not rolling with the moment, showing some respect of the occasion at hand.

AN ONGOING PRESENCE

On the art of being present, I want to take a moment to offer some words of appreciation to outgoing Mayor Geoff Dawe. Mayor Dawe will hang up his chains of office this week, leaving them to be picked up by Tom Mrakas on Saturday. Over the past eight years, Mayor Dawe has been a very visible presence in the community at just about every facet Aurora has to offer. Sure, it is part of the job description that comes with the office but, in my observation, Mayor Dawe has gone above and beyond filling this mandate. Respect is due for anyone who chooses to enter the often thankless realm of public life, but in recent weeks my respect for how Mayor Dawe has fulfilled the last days of his mandate has only grown. The message of the voters was heard loud and clear on October 22 and, faced with the same situation, some elected officials might take this time to simply lie low, make sure their office was packed, and all loose ends were tied up. This wouldn't exactly be uncharted territory for Aurora, but not so in 2018. Whether it has been at events as recent as Saturday's Santa Under the Stars Parade, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards, the recent Youth Innovation Fair, any number of new business openings, it has been full steam ahead for Mayor Dawe, without a flinch, as if nothing had changed, and offering the same level of public service he has for the last eight years. Well done.