

BROCK'S BANTER: Sentimental Journeys

By Brock Weir

Below a plain wall adorned with numerous paintings, sketches and photographs of Elizabeth Taylor was a glass case with various items related to the actress' professional life.

There were run-of-the-mill movie magazines, Christmas cards signed with the last name of the husband du jure, and clippings from a variety of publications from around the world.

One item, however, caught my eye: a rather large photo of Taylor with then husband Mike Todd at the races with friends Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds (the parents of Star Wars' own Princess/General Leia? you know, to keep this current). I had seen the picture before, but this one was different. Ms. Reynolds, on far right of the photo, had been crudely ripped off the side of the photo leaving Liz pictured with husbands number three and four, before the jilted wife, and perceived victim of the biggest celebrity sex scandal of the day, was hastily scotch taped back into place.

This wasn't the destruction and restoration of the average movie fan; this was the work of Andy Warhol, whose movie memorabilia is now on display through the end of the month at Toronto's TIFF Bell Lightbox.

For some reason, this little clipping fascinated me more than many of the other more beautiful, noteworthy and indeed iconic pieces in the exhibition, because I was just dying to know the journey this photo took from publication to this glass case in Toronto.

Was Ms. Reynolds' tear a simple act of a clipping gone wrong, or was she ripped out of the photo by Warhol himself in a fit of loyalty to the violet-eyed beauty? Probably the latter, but are we ever going to know for sure? Probably not.

The journey has always been fascinating for me.

Having grown up in a house full of an ever shifting parade of antiques brought in to enjoy for a time before being sold off to finance the next purchase, the past of each piece always held a bit of intrigue. Take, for example, a simple pair of wooden chairs. This matched set is identical in every way except for the size of the seats, comprised of woven sinews of a long-since-hunted creature tied to the wooden frame of the rest of the chair. The wider of the seat was, one assumes, for the gentleman of the family, while the narrower of the two was the perch for the lady of the house to accommodate her voluminous skirts. I assume this was the case, but the lady of the house might have simply had a larger-than-normal rear end. Their posteriors are historical postscripts.

Or take a run-of-the-mill trunk that is currently in my front hall. It's an ordinary trunk from the outside, but open it up and pasted in the lid is a front page from an Irish newspaper from the late 1700s.

How and why it is there, and the significance of any particular item on the tattered and browned newsprint, is lost to the ages, but the physical remains are still here ? and just happen to be biding their time in an Aurora townhouse until fate conspires to send it on to the next leg in its journey.

It now has good company thanks to Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard and the crafty woodworkers at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

On Thursday afternoon, I was honoured to receive a Maple Leaf Forever pen from Mr. Ballard.

The pen is one of 30 created by members of the Seniors' Centre from wood taken from the historic Maple Leaf Forever tree, the Toronto tree that inspired Alexander Muir to pen The Maple Leaf Forever, which was, for decades, considered Canada's unofficial anthem. The tree was felled by a windstorm in 2013 and the remaining wood was divvied up between a number of organizations, including the Seniors' Centre, for use in projects celebrating cultural and heritage initiatives.

Apparently I was nominated by former councillor Alison Collins-Mrakas, and chosen by Mr. Ballard's selection committee for our ongoing efforts here at The Auroran to promote local history as well as my work, wearing another hat, to help organize the community celebration this past September 9, to mark the date The Queen surpassed the record set by her predecessor, Queen Victoria, as our longest reigning monarch.

That was certainly a labour of love, so to receive something as unique as this was a distinct honour.

From his window, Muir cast his eyes on that tree. Who could have guessed that the trunk holding up those boughs would inspire something as enduring as The Maple Leaf Forever, a song that has not only stood the test of time, but has inspired others to dissect and sew it back up again in versions apparently more palatable to today's politically correct audiences.

Mother Nature might have had different plans for the tree, but its journey continues, splintered off in different directions, for projects great and small.

Who knew that a piece of it would make its way into these hands, playing a leading role in writing the first draft of the column you are reading at this very moment.

I don't often hammer out the first iteration of Brock's Banter in longhand anymore, but with this neat little pen in my possession, it seemed like the most fitting way to inaugurate it.

Ours promises to be a relationship with significantly more endurance than Eddie Fisher's with either Elizabeth Taylor or the scotch taped Debbie Reynolds, and the pen ? given, in the end, to commemorate a commemoration of Queen Elizabeth II ? might look nice on top of the Irish trunk, in a woody act of reconciliation.