

BROCK'S BANTER: The Noble Shift

By Brock Weir

Every once in a while we get calls at our office looking for the R&R Book Bar, the former new and used bookstore established by Auroran founder Ron Wallace and Rosemary Schumaker, which used to operate in tandem with the newspaper.

With the bookshop long-since-wound-down, the answer is usually a resounding 'no' when a potential customer calls to see if we have a particular Tom Clancy or 'Jacqueline Susann's latest,' which always struck me as an interesting request since the Valley of the Dolls author died in 1974.

Sometimes, however, requests prove to be more interesting when callers have a backstory.

Take Friday, for instance.

I received a call asking whether we had any further copies of Elizabeth Hearn Milner's 'Aurora 1945 - 1965: An Ontario Town at a Time of Great Change.'

As the title suggests, the 2007 volume charts the postwar history of Aurora from the long wait for peace to laying the foundations of the Aurora Community Centre, a project for Canada's Centennial.

Happily, I was able to direct my caller to a place likely to have a few volumes on the shelf - the Aurora Historical Society - but, as she spoke, I realised she had a very personal reason for wanting the book. Her grandfather, she explained, was James Murray, who served as Aurora's mayor from 1957 to 1960.

She spoke vividly of memories from visiting her family here, of the Town itself, of the Queen's Hotel, which once stood on the northeast corner of Yonge and Wellington on the current side of TD Canada Trust, and the IGA grocery store in behind it.

On her visits, just about everything east of the tracks was farmland, she recalled, and, of course, there was no Highway 404 to speak of.

It is a lost world, but still very much in the minds of many.

In some ways, if she hadn't been back to Aurora since the time her grandfather served on Council, there would some easily recognizable landmarks. Aside from the banks on the northern corners, Yonge and Wellington hasn't changed all that much, nor have the homes in the immediate vicinity. But anything further east? Well, that would have been inconceivable.

Hearn Milner characterizes the Aurora of 1945-1965 as 'An Ontario Town at a Time of Great Change,' but I think that title could also be applied to a future historian's look at the Aurora of 2017 and beyond.

If anyone happened to have stepped out of the Aurora experience at the end of 1965, they would be hard pressed to believe some of the changes that have taken place. One such case - as Scott notes this week - might be that their brand-new state-of-the-art library would soon be meeting a wrecking ball, having outlived its usefulness, becoming an increasingly dilapidated relic of the past.

It would be mind-blowing to stand by the GO tracks and look towards the bustling metropolis heading east. They probably wouldn't be able to comprehend that their Regency Acres bungalow, perhaps once a starter home, was now be subject to bidding wars with potential homeowners snagging them for upwards of \$1 million.

Then, of course, there is the political side of things.

There once was a time where the very idea of a 'sanctuary city' would have been inconceivable - both in intent, and in the fact there is a need for such a body to even exist. Yet, that is the world we live in.

Many of you will recall a brief debate which happened around the Council table at the end of January after the City of Toronto reaffirmed its status as a sanctuary city rejecting 'discrimination based on religious, ethnic, or national origin, affirms that refugees are welcome in our communities, and [Council] stands united with cities around the world against Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism, and calls on Canadians, community leaders, and elected officials to speak out against racial discrimination and hate in our communities, across the country and around the world.'

Although people debate the merits of a 'sanctuary city' both within and outside of these pages, I think most people here in Aurora would agree with the firm stance against these 'phobias' and 'isms' of every variety, and stand united against racial discrimination and hate.

Brought to the attention of local lawmakers by Councillor Humfryes, who called on Council to endorse it, I thought it was going to be a slam dunk. After all, Aurora routinely endorses motions sent to them from other municipalities, whether or not they have any bearing at all on Aurora, and regardless of frivolity.

In the end, I was disappointed that was not the case as Council got bogged down in the minutia, pondering just what impacts endorsing Toronto's status as a sanctuary city would have on Aurora and, God forbid, questioning the wisdom of giving a thumbs-up

to a motion some could see as reactionary and "anti-Trump."

And, so it was. Now, next month lawmakers will consider a motion from Councillor Gaertner that is a well-intentioned " although considerably defanged " stop gap.

It affirms that Aurora is a community that welcomes diversity, recognizes the strength that comes out of diversity, and that we're a community that "rejects intolerance based on race, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation."

The intent of the motion is noble, and it is just one stitch in a larger tapestry that is being woven right before our eyes.

As Aurora continues to grapple with the future of Library Square, Downtown Revitalization, and how to make sure all resources are present and accounted for as it reaches build out, there is a subtle shift in focus towards looking at the kind of town Aurora wants to be.

We have new bylaws ensuring street front signage for local businesses is at least 50 per cent in one of two Canada's official languages, motions like Councillor Gaertner's, and public meetings to gather as wide a cross-section of input as possible ensuring this year's Multicultural Festival ticks all the right boxes.

In cases like these, I often wonder how the actions of today will be interpreted by the people of tomorrow.

In her latest book, *An Aurora ABC: Stories from Aurora's Forgotten past*, local historian Jacqueline Stuart tells the story of an Asian laundryman in turn-of-the-century Aurora and to what degree he was accepted by the community. Then, of course, there are the plights of countless nameless Aurorans whose stories will inevitably be left untold; individuals who went about their daily business effectively and efficiently, but bristling under the collar feeling unable to practice their own religion, love who they truly loved, or live the way they truly wanted to live, for fear of going against the grain.

They are concepts that will, one hopes, be increasingly difficult for future generations to comprehend, and these stitches will go a long way in achieving this goal, as long as they are embraced and fostered by the community.

We have the building blocks and, collectively, we have the power to write the next chapter.