

BROCK'S BANTER: The Story Continues

By Brock Weir

Humans, whether we realise it or not, have an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

We generally want to know the lay of the land before we plunge too deep into a new project, we like to collect as many variables as possible in order to avoid any unpleasant surprises, and, more often than not, the little details can help inform your perspective if you are on the fence about a major life decision.

Sometimes, however, this information is harder to come by.

When I was growing up, I was a bit of a news junkie. If something on the evening news caught my attention, I wanted to see it through to the end. I wanted to know more about the 'characters' I read: the real life people, as I came to realise more and more as I approached my tweens who were making each story 'tick' and how their individual stories, the details just below the surface, had an impact on what was being reported.

If it really had a profound impact on me, I would seek out more information, as access allowed, to fill in any gaps in the narrative. And, if a particular story really had me on the edge of my seat, there were few things more frustrating than the story itself falling off the radar with little coverage given to its next chapter, or even its conclusion, if a loose end or two were still on the table.

In the end, I've come to feel that this early drive to find out more and to see a conclusion fuelled, at least in small part, my decision to enter into this line of work.

What I hadn't anticipated, however, were some of the emotional twists and turns certain stories can provide, if you follow them over time.

Take, for instance, those days leading up to November 11 when men and women who served in various branches of the Canadian Armed Forces in times of conflict are more than generous in sharing their stories so that the horrors of the past aren't repeated. More often than not these men and women 'and, given the gender gaps of the day, they are mostly men' are of a certain age, and their stories are imbued with the wisdom time allows.

But, as they are of a certain age, there is a poignancy when you're no longer able to share their stories in the lead-up to Remembrance Day when their time runs out and they leave us to join their fallen comrades. Sure, they have lived a good long life, but it is always sad when the stories they have written through simply living their lives come to their close.

It is especially heart-wrenching, however, when these stories come to a close before they are even written.

I thought a great deal about this over the past week writing about the launch of the Many Hands Doing Good foundation, an initiative spearheaded by Jennifer Neville Lake, whose father and three children were killed in a car crash September 2015.

I first encountered the family in the spring of 2013, when their middle son, Harrison, was taking his first steps as a War Amps Champ.

Harry, as he was known, had lived with significant challenges in his young life. Born in 2010 missing a thumb on his right hand, missing part of the radial bone on the same arm, and a non-functioning thumb on his right, the Neville-Lake family was introduced to the War Amps program a little while after his birth by SickKids Hospital.

This started a public journey for the family that endured until Harry lost his life that fateful day, alongside his elder brother Daniel, younger sister Milly, and grandfather Gary Neville.

For Daniel, Harry had been both a best friend and also a kind of 'mascot' for his local Beaver troop, coming to meetings with his brother to show other youngsters how to form a more inclusive, accessible society.

'[Daniel] didn't realise there was anything different about Harry,' Jennifer told me back in 2013. 'He was just his younger brother, four and a half years apart. Daniel asked me, 'Why does Harry crawl differently?' and I explained it is because Harrison can't do that and that is how he figured out how to do it. He started hitching up his brother's pants getting him to crawl properly, so I decided we should ask the War Amps to see if there is something they can do to help Daniel understand that his brother is different, but also that it is okay and not a scary thing, because he was getting upset at night.'

Their work with the War Amps, said Jennifer, helped the siblings and their friends realise that 'everybody is different and everybody does things differently.'

These lessons are likely to be poignant memories for those who live on, benefiting from the legacy the Neville Lake siblings left behind.

But now this is far from the end of the story; their legacies will continue for generations to come thanks to the establishment of Many Hands Doing Good, which has established art therapy supports for children and teens going through their own bereavement.

?I have nothing but admiration for Jennifer Neville Lake and her husband Ed, who are still dealing with tragedy few of us could even cope or fully understand, that she has poured her time and effort into the initiative to help children is no surprise to me,? said York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe at last week's launch.

?We know that trauma can have long-term effects on young children and, unfortunately, we also know that friends are not only children in our community or suffering the impact of trauma experienced. Children dealing with the effects of tragedy need help, patience, and understanding and support. We worry that parents may not be [aware] of the support that is currently available or, if they are, they are not able to pay for the programs their children are struggling with. That's why we are so proud to support Jennifer's foundation, Many Hands Doing Good Work.?

It was not a surprise to me either that Jennifer has ?poured her time and effort? into this initiative, as she poured her time and effort into ceaselessly raising awareness of accessibility concerns, laying the foundation for a more inclusive community, and ensuring her children's peers are armed with the knowledge of fostering this for generations to come.

Now, this work continues, as does their legacy, as does their story ? and I am now, once again, looking forward to writing the next chapter.

For more information on the foundation, visit manyhandsdoinggood.ca.