

# BROCK'S BANTER: They're All Around Us

**By Brock Weir**

How many times a week, or even per day, do we use, say, or hear the word 'hero'?

Over the years, 'hero' is a word that has come to mean different things to different people.

For some, the word can be applied to the great people of history such as Nelson Mandela, who died one year ago last week. For others, 'hero' can apply to individuals who might be unsung to everybody but themselves.

It can, of course, be used very personally, such as to a parent, or even a child, who was taken from the world well before their respective times, occasionally in tragic circumstances. Some might use the word to describe a more distant relative who took up arms and went overseas before losing their lives in the theatre of war, or a relative who might be little more than a footnote in the family folklore who, for reasons even inexplicable to yourself, speaks to you. Metaphorically of course.

They might have taken a moral stand against something that seemed relatively minute at the time, but turned out to be on the right side of history, or the author of a line in a diary that showed remarkable foresight into the issues all too familiar to our contemporary society.

In turn, the word can be used a bit too liberally. Case in point, the tweens who applied the word 'hero' to the likes of Justin Bieber a few short years ago. Thankfully, said tweens are becoming a rapidly more endangered species as they have grown up, while the hero of yore has failed to do the same. Bieber's case is not unique. For one of my parents, the word 'hero' was once applied to anybody who had the guts to 'stick it to the man?', while the other? well, the other's 'hero' was once Richard Nixon. Make of that what you will. However you slice it, the use of the word to describe the flavour of the month dilutes any meaning behind the word.

As the word around us has beefed up security, we have seen the word used exponentially more to describe the work of our police forces, fire departments, emergency responders and military personnel, not only for the work they do, but as the work becomes ever more dangerous in our society.

Going a decade or two, these positions weren't necessarily held in quite the esteem as they are today, but whatever the circumstances that conspired to make them more venerated, so much the better.

Last week, I was at Southlake Regional Health Centre where the very personal nature of the word was underscored. It was that time of year again for staff at Southlake to

## AND THEN?

I began writing the above passage on Sunday night. While transcribing my notes taken at Southlake last Wednesday afternoon, I was reflecting on that all-encompassing word 'hero' when I decided to grab a glass of limeade, take a writing break, and flip on the news, only to see the hostage situation taking place in an otherwise inconspicuous café in Sydney, Australia.

In the world of the 24 hour news cycle, that beast that has become a catchall bogeyman to so many, I have rarely seen something equal parts distressing and compelling, whether it was live video footage or photos that punctuated the scene a few moments after the fact.

I am not going to use this opportunity to reflect on the impact another apparently 'lone wolf' extremist, after all we collectively expended enough oxygen as it was discussing that very topic in the wake of the murders of Patrice Vincent and Nathan Cirillo over a month ago, but whether it was the café manager who lost his life trying to take the weapon away from the gunman, the mother who lost her life, the pained women who were forced to raise the banner through the café window, or the forces who ultimately took their captor down, many heroes were made out of the carnage, and they should be celebrated.

Which brings me back to my main point, which became considerably less significant by the hour:

'It was that time of year again for staff at Southlake to load up the fruits of their labour, along with York Regional Police, after weeks spent collecting toys and monetary donations for local kids in need, which will soon be distributed through the York Children's Aid Society and Salvation Army.

In his remarks, Southlake President and CEO Dr. Dave Williams said when people come to Southlake in times of distress, they often say the doctors, nurses and other frontline staff are their 'heroes' on the road back to health, but so too are the first responders.

This message was punctuated on Saturday when I went to a local grocery store where several members of the Aurora detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police were donating their time to load up their cruisers with donations to benefit the Aurora Food Pantry.

One of the officers said they particularly enjoyed being out there, volunteering, to help their community but it was more than disheartening for them to be heckled by a few smartasses questioning what they were doing out there on their tax dollar. In all

honesty, it was disheartening to hear that recounted.

With just a week until Christmas, spare a thought for the individuals who are volunteering their time to make the holidays just a little bit brighter for those who might not be able to shine on their own, whether they are individuals in the forces, at the hospital, or in schools participating in the holiday heroes campaign, students at Hartman Public School gathering winter hats, mitts, and scarves to keep their peers warm, or those who are prepared to trudge out taking a break from their Christmas turkey to shovel out seniors who might otherwise be stranded.

Like it or not, those are the true? well, you get the idea.