

BROCK'S BANTER: They're not the 'walking dead'?

By Brock Weir

After false reports sprang up detailing his demise around the turn of the last century, American novelist Mark Twain memorably quipped 'reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.'

Death, the one great certainty, ultimately came a-calling, and since Death never really takes a holiday, false death reports maintain a cottage industry. These have only heightened in the information age, kicking into high gear through the proliferation of social media. Those of us who engage in social media in one form or another have undoubtedly seen these reports, which are shared without an inclination to fact check the invariably adrenaline-fuelled stories on the untimely deaths of people like Tom Hanks meeting their maker after performing some sort of daredevil feat.

These flurry of death rumours hit the online community two or three times a year, leading people like Hanks to take a second out from their holidays or film shoots to assure the world that they too are on the right side of the ground 'at least for the time being. Over the past couple of weeks, it has become clear it's Mother Nature's time to step up to the plate and also say reports of her death have been greatly exaggerated.

Over the past few decades, she has taken quite a hit.

Battered and bloodied by her children over the millennia before efforts accelerated over the last century, the poor girl has been left pockmarked. Her blood, our water, has been poisoned. Her flesh, our earth, has become pitted, burned and scabbed. And the bounty she provides has now, as a result, been called into question.

Nevertheless, she chugs along, doing her best to provide that clean water to sustain us, the flesh in which we produce our resources, the trees and plants which replenish our air, and a never-ending supply of natural wonder to keep us awestruck and busy.

And how to we repay her? We get lured away by the latest shiny hussy that comes along. But, this bimbo, which has tempted us with its come-hither LCD screens, has become an unlikely White Knight for Mother Nature and engaging in what she provides.

This past Thursday, I was walking south on Yonge Street from our office near Wellington enroute to the Aurora Public Library.

Along the way, I heard the muffled squeak of a rubber-soled shoe running aground on an uneven paving stone.

I saw the culprit up ahead: an older teen wearing an eye-catching combination of vivid blues and oranges. His bright azure and white Adidas runners had hit the pavement just south of Mosley but it didn't seem to faze him. In fact, he wasn't fully into a stumble before he righted himself, recalibrated his limbs and continued on, all the while never taking his eyes off the Smart Phone he clutched in his hands.

He continued on, I continued on, and I hardly made it 15 more steps when I heard the sound once again through the cacophony of mounting traffic.

He had run aground again, he was walking again, and once again he had not looked up.

By this point, he was at the Yonge and Mosley intersection and didn't bother to look up as he crossed the street to the next block. By this point, I was too fascinated to continue, and stopped by the railing of the CIBC to see what would happen next.

Curious as to whether this guy was ever going to look up and take notice, I stood there, unmoving, as he got closer and closer. And closer. Quickly, he was about to make contact with my own blue shoes when he stopped dead in his tracks less than a metre away and, in a split second, juttled to his left and jogged around me, once again never looking up.

I turned around quickly, eager to confirm my suspicions and, yes, this gentleman was in the heat of tracking down pocket monsters in the new Pokemon Go app.

Unless you have been living under a rock, you are already familiar 'perhaps too familiar' with the concept of this program, where people download it onto their phones and use the built-in cameras to seek out and capture Pokemon scattered through just about every community with access to a WiFi or cell reception.

My suspicions confirmed, I continued on my way, not eager to look back and see if the hunter made it across Wellington. There have been no police reports to the contrary, so well done, whoever you are.

As parents, communities, and society in general bemoan the rise of personal devices and the ironic disconnect resulting from being so readily connected to the world, not to mention the subsequent rising tide of an alienation from nature, sedentary lifestyle, and everything that comes with that, who could have guessed that a cell phone app would be the one thing to coax this generation out of their basements?

It has vaulted them into parts of their respective communities they would not otherwise darken, and cross paths and interact with fellow hunters they never would have engaged in.

Like the first iteration of Pokemon nearly 20 years ago, this fad will inevitably fade but the people, places and things hunters encounter along the way, as well as the all-important connections fostered, have a better chance of standing the test of time. And, for that Mother Nature might be due for a resurgence.

If you have not yet succumbed to the fad ? and, in the interests of full disclosure, I have no plans to download it myself having been immune to First Wave Pokemonism when I was its target demographic ? take this as an opportunity to learn.

Its astronomic popularity has proven once again that engagement in the mundane is indeed possible if framed correctly in a novel, if not nostalgic, way. If people can be given a good reason to come out of their lairs, other applications are surely possible.

Take, for instance, attempts by the Aurora Museum & Archives to get people to explore the treasures to be found in the Downtown quadrant now colloquially known as the Cultural Precinct through the tried and true methods of geocaching.

A noble effort to be sure, and something that appeals to the more ardent geocachers among us, but it seems nowadays Pokémon positioned outside the Aurora Armoury or in a corner of the Rising Sun Masonic Lodge might be a bit more appealing than hunting down a silver coloured medallion commemorating 22 Church Street, no matter how attractive the medallion might be. (And it is. It is sitting on my desk as I write).

Next month, the 2016 Aurora Ribfest kicks into high gear a month early to avoid the inclement weather of September, casting off the it-seemed-like-a-bad-idea-at-the-time idea to institute a wristband policy to ensure the after-eight revelry is strictly open to the 18-plus. Throwing up a time-sensitive Pokémon knock-off somewhere at the Aurora Community Centre might now be the most efficient way possible to lure the young'uns out of Machell Park while their parents and grandparents get down to the sounds of their generation.

Each year, there is a familiar refrain around the Council table bemoaning the lack of public participation in the budget process. A term or two ago, former mayor Evelyn Buck suggested tongue-in-cheek the obvious solution of offering ?dancing girls? as part of the budget floorshow.

Now that this craze is in full swing ? and Budget preparations are now underway ? is there a particularly sexy Pokémon available for hire to lure residents into Council chambers with her or his whiles?

It might be something to look into.

In the meantime, however, just enjoy the fact people are out there, interacting with each other, exploring their communities.