

BROCK'S BANTER: Yield to Experience

By Brock Weir

Another Christmas has come and gone and, by the time you read this, another year will have gone the same way.

Due to the relatively unusual occurrence of both Christmas Day and New Year's Day falling on our production days, I am writing this in that almost-twilight period between the two statutory holidays.

For some people, it is a time of doing absolutely nothing, keeping the internal batteries charged until work begins in a fresh and shiny new year. For others, there is very little break and you're back at your desk by December 27, trying to get back up to speed while fighting off the inevitable turkey fog.

How ever you spent this in-between time, I hope you used it to your best advantage and are ready to take on 2019 with all the vim and vigour it will ultimately require ? that is, if 2018, a humdinger of a year by any measure, is an indication of things to come.

It was a year of unrest and upheaval, a year of triumphs and tragedy; some of the things we have witnessed collectively as a country, and as members of the global human race were unthinkable just a few short years ago but, sadly, have become ? and I hate to use this phrase too cavalierly ? part of our ?new normal.?

From my perspective, Christmas and the rest of the Holiday Season is a comfort in that it provides a few constants. Whether you come from a large or small family, or march to the beat of your own yuletide drummer, there are often some well-worn holiday traditions that only add to the warmth of the season. There is, of course, always room to start new traditions.

Within my own family, we were in year two of a new experiment of splitting our holidays at Christmas Eve rather than on Boxing Day. Travelling to Part 1 of our traditional two-part Christmas celebration on December 24 rather than December 26, as nearly 30 years of tradition had previously dictated, took some getting used to in 2017, but it has proved the key to unlocking so much free time for the important things of the season?while keeping stress levels to a bare minimum.

Although I'm still not quite used to the chipper seasonal greeting from the ?customer service representative? on the early Christmas Morning GO Train down the Barrie line to Part 2 of the Celebration, I've been warmed two-years running that once settled into my seat I'm literally on track for the rest of the tradition and ritual that have become an inextricable component of the season.

Among these is the Queen's Christmas Message.

Home in good time this year, it was nice to have the flurry of Christmas Morning essentially done by the time the 66-year custom arrived at 12 noon on the CBC. While everything grinds to a temporary halt for the Queen's 10 minute window each year, this time there was nothing too pressing on the other side to distract from the message ? which was a good thing as I think our Head of State delivered some pointed observations that will keep us in good stead throughout the New Year.

The Queen's Christmas Message is a tradition that began with the Queen's grandfather, King George V, a tradition which continued with her father, George VI, and has been carried out every year by Elizabeth II each year (bar 1968) since her ascension to the throne in 1952.

The endurance of this tradition was touched upon in this year's message:

?At Christmas, we become keenly aware of loved ones who have died, whatever the circumstances. But, of course, we would not grieve if we did not love,? said The Queen, reflecting on her father's experiences at the front, looking back over 2018's Armistice Centenary, before turning to the Prince of Wales' 70th birthday. ?Some cultures believe a long life brings wisdom. I like to think so. Perhaps, part of that wisdom is to recognize some of life's baffling paradoxes, such as the way human beings have a huge propensity for good, yet a capacity for evil.

?Even the power of faith, which frequently inspires generosity and self-sacrifice, can fall victim to tribalism. But through the many changes I have seen over the years: faith, family and friendship have been not only a constant for me, but a source of personal comfort and reassurance.?

Changing focus to the Commonwealth, the Heads of Government for which met at Buckingham Palace this past spring to plan for the future of an organization that includes 2.4 billion people spread throughout 53 nations around the globe, the Queen said ?It's strength lies in the bonds of affection it promotes and a common desire to live in a better, more peaceful world.?

?Even with the most deeply held differences, treating the other person with respect and as a fellow human being is always the first step towards a greater understanding,? she concluded.

Over the past twelve months, and undoubtedly over many of the twelve before that, we have seen far too often the dangers of tribalism rearing its ugly head, permeating a number of areas of life we previously thought were finally impenetrable.

While here in this community, we have seen how groups have used the power of their faith to deliver potent messages of generosity

and self-sacrifice, whether they have sponsored refugee families to make a new home in Canada or, on a much more manageable scale, simply taken on the ideas of providing hot meals and fellowship local homeless and other struggling families, this is not always the case in the wider world.

Outside the community level, we have seen faith-based and culture-based ideas bastardized into the forms of tribalism over which the Queen has raised alarm bells.

In my opinion, we don't have to look too far to find prime examples of this, from the manufactured clash our southern neighbours are having at their own southern border which, as of this writing, has resulted in the deaths of two children; to the continued fight for Ontario's sex-ed curriculum, with some questioning the very consultation system they put in place because the results did not conform to ? or confirm ? their narrow, politically-driven expectations; to more partisan individuals in the community, committed to the ?hive mind? mentality, despite logic, who seem to be continually and, possibly, deliberately befuddled, by the clear line between fact and opinion; to the rhetoric that is already flying in the lead-up to 2019's Federal Election.

At this time, the Queen's simple message is one that will be continually valuable throughout the year ahead: ?Even with the most deeply-held differences, treating the other person with respect and as a fellow human being is always the first step towards a greater understanding.?

I wish you all a happy, healthy and respectful New Year!