

A decade of progression

by MIKE BAKER

What a ride it has been over the past ten years.

As we prepare to wrap up the decade that was, I thought it might be an appropriate time for me to partake in something of a wander down memory lane. Please, feel free to join me.

I was just 18 years old when the clock struck midnight on Dec. 31, 2009. I was in Canada, visiting my now wife and grandparents for Christmas. As the ball dropped in Times Square, I was having the time of my life, partying with a group of high school friends. I didn't have a single care in the world. Ahhh, to be young again.

Back then, I was actually living in England. After spending two years at high school in Canada, I decided to take something of a gap year. Since I wasn't studying, and I didn't have a Canadian work permit, I returned to my roots in Manchester. The intent was that I'd find a job and save money to pay for whatever post-secondary program I decided to enrol in upon my return to the Great White North. Yeah? That didn't quite pan out.

It took me four months to secure my first job. It was a minimum wage position as a door-to-door salesman, attempting to flog cavity wall and loft insulation. Despite how mundane that sounds, I was actually quite good at it. Within weeks I went from being the new kid on the block to the number one salesman. When I began this endeavour, the promise was that, while my hourly rate was a measly £5.25 per hour, I would earn commission if I met certain targets. In my first month, I blew those targets out of the water. I was looking forward to my big fat bonus.

Then, the harsh realities of life in the working world slapped me right in the face. After enquiring about my well-earned bonus, I was informed the majority of my sales didn't qualify for commission for some reason or another. Two weeks later, I was let go.

As it turns out, that was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. In my seven or eight weeks working as a door-to-door salesman, I managed to save zero dollars. For those of you who don't understand how things work over here for international students, my college fees were going to set me back close to \$20,000 per year. And that's just for tuition and books. Bottom line, I needed money, lots of it, and quickly.

And that's how I ended up landing the best job I've ever had. Now, before your minds wander, allow me to explain. My mother worked for a direct competitor of the organization I sold for. My now former firm, apparently, was a bit of an upstart, cowboy operation, launched by someone who had been let go from my mother's company. It was all a bit strange.

After learning of my untimely departure, my mum managed to pull some strings within her own company. She managed to get me an interview. I didn't particular enjoy walking around in the rain, attempting to convince people to part with hundreds of pounds so that they could stuff some wool-like material in their walls and loft space, but I was willing to do it.

When I arrived for my interview, I was greeted by one of the firm's senior managers. Strange, I thought, for such an entry level position. Now, I don't know what my mother told this person, but here I was, basically a kid with next to zero experience in the working world, being interviewed for a position that would see me become a senior surveyor. What that means, basically, is I would be the individual going around to people's homes and conducting on-site tests to determine if their home is suitable for cavity wall and loft insulation installation, and recommending, to the work crews, the best way to go about installing previously aforementioned insulation.

To this day, I don't know how I managed to pull it off, but the interview went well, and I got the job. I started two days later. Fortunately, I was tasked with tailing an experienced surveyor on my first day. The job, as complicated or important as it might

sound, was actually very, very easy. Within a week, I was completing between 10 and 15 surveys per day.

And that's why that was the best job I've ever had. I was paid based on how many surveys I completed. While I had targets I had to meet on the low end, I could actually complete as many as I wanted. Perfect for somebody with nothing but time on his hands, and a need to make a buck. In six months working that job, I raked in more than what I make in 12 months working for the Citizen.

While my intent was always to save, and return to Canada, for the briefest of moments I allowed myself to wonder. Wonder what life could be like earning that sort of money at such a young age. In the end, I made the right decision. Within six months of returning to Canada, that company was bought out by a larger competitor, stripped down and closed. A lucky escape if ever there was one.

My journey since has been fairly well documented in many a page of past Citizens - j-school in Oshawa, my first newspaper out in Alberta, a brief fling with the magazine industry in Peterborough, and, finally, landing here in Orangeville. It's been one heck of an adventure, professionally speaking.

If you had asked me that night, Dec. 31, 2009, where I would be ten years later, I wouldn't have even been able to tell you, for sure, what continent I'd be on, never mind my job, or anything else. I guess that's the beauty of life ? we never really know what's around the corner.

While there have been many, many fond moments for me over the past ten years, I'm very much looking forward to seeing what the 2020s have in store for me. Until next time, Orangeville?

Oh, yeah, and Happy New Year!