

A world of pure imagination?

by BROCK WEIR

The holiday season is behind us, a New Year has started, and many of us are looking ahead to the future and all the possibilities that lie ahead over the next 12 months ? for better or worse.

For many, this time of year is a great excuse to try and get a fresh start, shucking off some of the proverbial residue of the year that was ? and, let's face it, for a lot of people, 2023 was far from a barn-burner ? and adopting some methods to make that fresh start happen, or adopting that oh-so-popular mantra of ?new year, new me.?

That's one that gets thrown around a lot, perhaps more frequently with each passing year ? and, you know what? That's nothing to sneeze at. Some of us need that extra little kick in the pants to get going towards whatever that vague-sounding goal might be. For others, you might need to expend a bit more effort to get that forward momentum in action.

I'm not necessarily a ?new year, new me? kind of person, but I do like to put in at least some effort to start the year off in the way I want it to continue through December. It doesn't have to be anything too elaborate; it can be as simple as doing something different as the calendar flips, or on the first full day of the year, whether it is ringing in midnight in a place I've never been before, or with a new crop of friends-to-be; or spending January 1 doing something a little bit out-of-the ordinary.

The game plan this year was to watch midnight roll in at a Toronto tiki bar, but, after starting to feel a bit under-the-weather in the early afternoon of December 31, this was re-thought to a simple night in. Given the tumult of 2023, a simple night in wasn't the worst way to bid it farewell and set the tone for the next 12 months.

In fact, there is some comfort to be had in doing something more traditional, even if it is watching the ball drop amongst thousands gathered in Times Square, or whatever celebration you might want to dial up.

Traditions, after all, become so for a reason.

For my family, one of our traditions during the holiday season is taking in the King's Christmas Message. Again in the spirit of setting the tone for the year ahead, I find it always, whether delivered by Charles III or his late mother, provides plenty of food for thought as one year closes and we look forward to whatever the new one has in store for us.

This year's message had, in my opinion, a timely reminder for all.

?[Volunteers] are an essential backbone of our society,? said the King, looking back on a milestone year for him. ?Their presence meant so much to us both and emphasized the meaning of the Coronation itself: above all, a call to us to serve one another, to love and care for all. Throughout the year, my family have witnessed how people of all ages are making a difference to their communities. This is all the more important at a time of real hardship for many, when we need to build on existing ways to support others less fortunate than ourselves.

?To care for [God's Creation] is a responsibility owned by people of all faiths and of none. We care for the Earth for the sake of our children's children. During my lifetime, I have been so pleased to see a growing awareness of how much we must protect the Earth and our natural world as the one home which we all share. I find great inspiration now from the way so many people recognize this ? as does the Christmas Story, which tells us that angels brought the message of hope first to the shepherds. These were people who lived simply amongst others of God's creatures. Those close to nature were privileged that night.

?And at a time of increasingly tragic conflict around the world, I pray that we can also do all in our power to protect each other. The words of Jesus seem more than ever relevant: ?do to others as you would have them do to you.' Such values are universal, drawing

together our Abrahamic family of religions, and other belief systems, across the Commonwealth and wider world. They remind us to imagine ourselves in the shoes of our neighbours, and to seek their good as we would our own.?

I don't know about the rest of you, but to me it feels more and more we're living in a society that is increasingly focused on the individual rather than the greater good. In my personal view, we've seen this shift away from what we traditionally viewed as the ?greater good? kicked into warp speed as the Global Pandemic wore on. While we were all in the same boat, those who rankled under lockdowns and stay-at-home orders began taking the idea of personal freedoms to the extreme ? that is, damn the consequences to anyone else.

Similarly, this has spilled over, in my view, into some contrasting views on our cherished right to freedom of expression ? often erroneously referred to in our country as ?freedom of speech.? It often feels like it's not really freedom of expression they're concerned about rather than consequence-free expression, particularly in our age of online rhetoric that is increasingly polarized and anonymous.

At the start of 2024, I think it is high time to examine and re-evaluate the value of getting just a little further back to basics.

We are lucky in our community to have countless people who give back to benefit the greater good, don't get me wrong, but it often feels there are plenty of people who look at life, whether it is in the home or on a much larger scale, solely through a lens of how things impact them rather than the bigger picture.

The environment, as noted by the King, is just one area where this has manifested itself.

It might be challenging for some to change a few daily habits for the betterment of the environment, but this personal inconvenience can be viewed as an unsurmountable roadblock, rather than a worthwhile endeavour to leave something better than how you found it.

Rhetoric is another.

?They remind us to imagine ourselves in the shoes of our neighbour, and to seek their good as we would our own.?

To this end, in 2024, a little imagination can go a heck of a long way!