

Being nimble with our giving

by BROCK WEIR

I don't necessarily remember the first time I picked up a ballpoint pen to set it to paper, but I do recall the first pen I had to call my own was one of those blue and white numbers that had three colours of ink to choose from ? four, if you were lucky.

Those pens seemed like the height of sophistication, but, then again, that might not mean much. Around the same time, our generation placed similar esteem in Viennetta Ice Cream and exotic-sounding International Coffees!

Maybe I wielded that first pen to sign my name on a birthday or Christmas card bound for a loved one. Maybe it was a letter to Santa, sent to the furthest reaches of the north by Canada Post. But it would take until I was about seven-years-old until a specific letter-writing experience was committed to memory.

In Grade 2, we were tasked with writing a notable public figure on a potential shared interest in the hopes we might get some kind of response back. Perhaps unsurprisingly for regular readers of this column, my chosen recipient was the late Queen Elizabeth II.

The fire that devastated Windsor Castle in November of 1992 was brought under control just a few days before we received our letter-writing assignments, so this seemed like a great opening, even if under the most unfortunate of circumstances.

While I remember writing the letter, what's indelibly imprinted, however, was the day my dad came home from checking the mailbox a few weeks later with a crisply neat envelope in hand.

The first thing I noticed was a purple rubber stamp mark in the bottom left corner of the envelope bearing the cypher of ?E II R? surmounted by a crown. If that wasn't excitement enough, the embossed red Coat of Arms on the reverse was just about the tipping point.

Then, there was the letter itself, which is still a treasured possession.

There was no hesitation about taking the reply, even if it was from one of the Queen's Ladies in Waiting, into school the next day and my teacher, if not my peers, were suitably impressed. I'm not sure if marks were given out for this assignment, but if there were, I can't imagine it was anything but aced.

As we get older, the trip to the mailbox is not always as exciting. We get bills, we get government notices, sometimes little communiques that get our dander up, the one bright spot now is how rarely we now receive hard copies of chain letters nowadays!

At least, that's how it is for eleven out of twelve months of the year.

Then, no matter how old we are, a little bit of that mailbox magic invariably returns.

Maybe it's a matter of anticipation waiting for a seasonal greeting from a loved one you don't hear from very often, perhaps only at this time of year.

Maybe it's a matter of receiving a bit of support from unexpected sources, if you're in need. Maybe it's even a matter of waiting for that mildly irritating family Christmas Letter from long-since-dispersed neighbours telling everyone on their mailing list what a stellar year they've had, one that the rest of us can only aspire to, while deftly sidestepping any of the bumps along the road that might crack their official facades. (And maybe I speak from experience on this one!)

Granted, there is still a generous amount of time between our press time this week and the peak of the holiday season, the lack of

movement in the ongoing Canada Post strike at the time of this writing makes the chances of a magical Christmas-By-Mail experience slimmer with each passing hour.

And this, while leaving the very real labour concerns at the heart of the dispute on the table, is unfortunate for the average Canadian.

That said, however, I have been impressed by how deftly the community has been able to sidestep a number of challenges that have come along with this labour disruption.

On Monday, for instance, I was thrilled to learn that not only was the campaign led by Aurora residents Dianne and Brian Harrison to collect Christmas and Holiday Greetings for men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces successful, but it shattered all previous records set by the couple ? and the communities who support them ? over their last 19 years of hard work.

Congratulations to both the Harrisons and to everyone who contributed to make this season brighter for nearly 12,000 individuals.

And, as someone who has a passion for the written word, it's always nice to see when rumours of the death of letters, cards and other traditional forms of correspondence, are proved greatly exaggerated!

While this initiative was able to continue uninterrupted despite the interruption most of the rest of the country is currently experiencing, other individuals, organizations and initiatives haven't been faring so well.

As many of the non-profits in our community rely on the postal service to keep donations and other forms of support rolling in at a time when it is most needed, it's time to find workarounds for their sake and ours.

?Holiday giving, over the months of November and December, represents a significant percentage of our annual donations,? said Leslie Ring, Chief Development Officer of the Southlake Health Foundation, in a recent statement. ?Southlake Health serves a large catchment area and, as a result, our donor pool is also geographically diverse. Many donors choose to mail in their gifts from across our communities at this time of year. This disruption in postal services is extremely challenging for those donors who may not be familiar with or have the access to, online ways to give. It's concerning as those donations are urgently needed to help fund equipment, technology, and space upgrades for patients and providers at Southlake.?

Similar outreach was offered by Headwaters Healthcare Foundation in a statement last month, which said the strike has brought ?chaos? to their end-of-year fundraising campaigns, as without mail service, their annual appeal would be going to thousands less in 2024.

But it needn't be this way ? and the needs faced by our local hospitals are similar to those of countless charities and non-profits throughout our communities, regardless of who they serve and for whom they provide.

Just because an appeal hasn't landed in your mailbox, doesn't mean these funds are not needed.

As the clock ticks down to the start of a New Year, consider making online gifts through each organizations' preferred method (and don't forget to check with them on said method ahead of time); stop by a group in person with what you would ordinarily donate; or simply give them a call to see what's needed beyond the coin.

Over the last few years, we've become no strangers to pivoting ? and, at this time of year, we should be nimble enough to do the same with our giving.