

Broadened Perspectives

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

As we enter the third year of a global pandemic, now might be a good time to take stock of where we've been and where we are going.

The last 24-odd months have been a struggle for all of us, first as we worked to get accustomed to our suddenly smaller world.

Some of us saw it as an opportunity to get a number of long-languishing chores done, while others saw it as an opportunity to learn a new skill, pick up a new hobby, or dust off an old one. That was a good a time as any to see if that old muscle memory snapped back into place. They always say, "Oh, it's just like riding a bike," but the downtime was a great opportunity to see if this equally dusty adage held true.

At the same time, for others, it was simply a matter of survival. If you felt the walls close in as we were encouraged to stay home, perhaps you felt your personal bandwidth ebb and flow accordingly.

You might not have felt you had the wherewithal to tackle those household tasks. Maybe the inspiration wasn't there to pick up a new hobby or skill. Perhaps an old hobby that piqued your interest simply didn't bring the same amount of joy that it once did.

That's okay; We had a brand-new world thrust upon us with very little notice.

We all needed time to adjust and find our bearings once again.

We were told from the outset that conquering COVID was likely going to be a marathon rather than a sprint, and so, if you weren't as productive as others in your family, friend circle, or neighbourhood, that's fine.

All we could do in this situation was our best ? and many of us did just that.

It was an adjustment and there were many "new normals" a-knocking that we had to get used to, find our way, and forge ahead.

Now, there's another "new normal" to contend with as capacity limits in most settings are lifted and we've essentially been given the go-ahead to put down our QR codes ? again, in most settings.

As the rules of the game change once again, with businesses given the independence to decide whether or not they will still require customers and patrons to prove their vaccination status, it will be another steep learning curve for business owners, customers, co-workers and Ontarians writ-large.

Patience, already in short supply for so many residents, will need to be exercised, even if we have to tap into our respective reserves, as we all settle into the next phase of this fight.

For some of you, the new rules might be a harbinger of joy and relief as you return to your normal day-to-day lives. For others, if you're immunocompromised, have people in your households or families who might be, or if you're simply cautious, it might feel like you're descending perilously into "the wild west."

All perspectives are valid, all come with their own reasons, and whatever your personal view, it wouldn't hurt to consider and respect the views and, perhaps most importantly, the limitations of others.

But perspective might be something else that has taken a considerable hit over the course of the pandemic.

Our physical worlds shrank, to be sure, but while this was the case, we found new ways to stay connected. But doing so virtually has its limitations. Virtual connections may have felt strong at the outset, but, for me and many people I know, the novelty wore off relatively quickly.

Seeing friends, family and other loved ones on a screen was initially a balm for the soul but not being able to see them in person or, once we were able to see them in person under public health guidelines, not being able to travel to meet them in person was frustrating at best.

This frustration may have led us to look at the global pandemic through a lens of how it was impacting us personally rather than taking stock of the broader picture at home or abroad.

In my view, we saw that in protests big and small against public health mandates, whether it was a handful of people holding placards at a busy corner getting their message out to morning rush-hour traffic, dozens of people 'storming' the Eaton Centre to make some sort of vague point about something, a couple hundred people taking over the lawns of Queen's Park to protest Provincial mandates and, apparently, lick the statues of historic Monarchs and, Premiers to 'prove their robust gut health' I don't know, those were strange times.

Most recently, we had the 'Freedom Convoy' which saw thousands of people occupy Ottawa to ostensibly protest vaccine mandates for cross-border truckers, despite the fact that if the Trudeau government caved to their demands there was no guarantee the Biden government would scrap the same policy, rendering the whole affair pointless.

In between apparently fighting for our freedoms, they had the time to take their kids out of school, hold a pig roast, set up a soft-tub for a good soak in between bouts of 'freedom fighting' not exactly scenes of people who are being oppressed by their government.

Now, we've been snapped back to reality by the images of brave Ukrainians taking up arms to defend their nation against an foreign invasion and of women and children fleeing to the safety of Poland and other bordering nations, fighting for their lives when their freedom is actually under threat.

This is a terrifying situation not just for Ukraine but the world.

We might feel helpless, but there are many ways we can lend our support, be it financial or morale, to the men, women and children most immediately impacted by the war.

If nothing else, it has been a sharp reminder that even though many people may have thrown up their hands when it comes to the global pandemic, we're still in this together, even if our definition of 'this' is rapidly changing in the face of a conflict that threatens the entire globe.

It has also been a much-needed reminder of what freedom is and what it truly looks like when freedom is threatened.

The next little while will be a very challenging time for Europe, NATO member states, and the world as a whole, but these are truths and realities we can neither forget nor ignore as we head into what might be yet another, far more tragic 'new normal'.