

Closest to reality without going over

by BROCK WEIR

My generation, by and large, had it pretty good.

Born almost right in the middle of the 1980s, we were able to catch the tail end of the decade, so there's still a point of reference when we can share in the nostalgia that kids born in the 70s seem to inexplicably have for the Reagan-Thatcher-Mulroney era, yet we were also young enough to feel like trailblazers who helped shape the 1990s.

Although I hate when people are nostalgic for days gone by, especially when they refer to them as 'the good ol' days' or 'a simpler time' as that's almost invariably a sensation created by even the most mildly tinted rose-coloured glasses, there is at least one area where there's an element of truth to it: staying home sick from school and/or work.

I know, I know, by now we've all probably had enough of working or learning from home, sick or otherwise, to last a lifetime, but hear me out on this: who else has very fond memories of not being able to go to school for one reason or another, and one of the few things that made getting out of bed enticing was settling in at 11 a.m. with a nice bowl of soothing soup and a date with Bob Barker as he pushed dinette sets, futons, and any number of vehicles on people who had the luck to guess closest to the actual retail price without going over?

Let's be real for a moment: with the concept of practical-in-day-to-day-life math lessons in class a shockingly and comparatively recent development, The Price is Right was really our first real crash course in price comparison, cheque writing, and, of course, Plinko, now an OLG mainstay.

It was a treat to be able to catch it in the morning, as was the Canadian version of Supermarket Sweep which saw people from our side of the border show off their prowess in power shopping and filling their carts with inflatable wheels of cheese, papier-mâché prosciutto, a rafter (don't worry, I looked it up) of frozen Butterball turkeys, and inordinate numbers of Obusforme back supports.

So, really, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Blame? I'm talking about a return to some of the grotesque scenes we see creeping over to our side of the border when, as is so often the case after American Thanksgiving, people were lined up for hours outside of the big box stores of their choice, looking to get a deal on the latest and greatest tchotchke they allegedly can't live without.

I'm not, of course, talking about the people who were out there tempting the fickle finger of fate by waiting for their chance to take a crack at something that might be essential but previously financially out of reach, like a new refrigerator or range; rather, I'm referring to the people who would wrestle a neighbour for a slightly cheaper Xbox, ten bucks off the latest and greatest game to play on it, or a 75 per cent cut on a pair of jeans that were ripped all to hell but ripped just right.

Maybe I'm the odd one out, but generally speaking I've never really seen the point of all the Black Friday foofaraw. Perhaps it would make more sense if Black Friday was aligned with our own domestic Thanksgiving rather than the American Christmas warm-up, but I doubt it.

I'm not necessarily beholden to the idea of getting out of bed in the middle of the night to find a place in line simply for the privilege of giving away whatever money just to get the thrill of a deal.

To date, my one 'big' Black Friday purchase was a good deal on a 32" television set found at a local grocery store nearly a decade ago on a lunchtime sandwich run. A 'big buy' of a portrait of Eartha Kitt, priced to move at a shop within a Toronto movie theatre, was my one contribution to this year's effort.

Now, as I write this, we're in the middle-of-the-day heat on so-called Cyber Monday and, going by my social media feeds, I see the drive to find deals is as strong a few days later.

Don't get me wrong; I don't begrudge anyone getting a deal, nor do I begrudge any business for dancing the dance of the seven 50 per cent off veils in order to drum up commerce and make up any ground that may have been lost during the pandemic. And, in a time of high inflation, anything that can help stretch a dollar, is a good thing.

What fascinates me, and not necessarily in a positive way, is the two very different pictures this singular phenomenon creates.

The position that we write from gives us a unique perspective on the communities we serve.

It's no secret that the holidays are a time when food banks and similar services that help our neighbours make ends meet hurt the most. While people are invariably generous at this time of year, the needs are higher than ever before.

Additionally, now more than ever before, for some of the reasons listed above, we're seeing these needs hovering sky-high year-round.

The images we are bombarded with of individuals willing to physically brawl over anything from a cheap air fryer or a marked-down entertainment system that would barely fit into the average living room are hard to reconcile with the true needs we know are out there in the community.

Let's hope that those who came out in the dark of night to tap their cards will take a moment to tap once again if they see a Salvation Army kettle this year, buy an extra item or two to help fill a cruiser parked outside their favourite grocery store, or donate the ?outmoded? versions of whatever their Black Friday spoils are intended to replace, to people who actually need them.

And, while we're at it, in the true spirit of Bob Barker, do their bit to help control the pet population by having their pets spayed or neutered.