

Considering Ajuinnata

by BROCK WEIR

Canada Day is a holiday that invariably fills me with pride.

We Canadians aren't necessarily boastful about what we have, but it's the one day where it doesn't feel weird, excessive, or too rah-rah-rah to wear our collective hearts on our red-and-white sleeves and celebrate what binds us together as a country.

This year, however, the holiday didn't follow the pattern it has for the last number of years.

As some of our papers went to press on Tuesday, on which Canada Day just happened to fall this year, it was an early day at the office rather than taking in all the festivities the morning had to offer.

But there were still ways for us office-bound Canadians to steep ourselves in Canadiana.

Working out of our Aurora base on Yonge Street, I had the great good fortune to be in the midst of it all ? well, the midst of it some, anyway ? as the Town's annual Canada Day parade passed right by our door.

Now, there are always plenty of reasons to get out from behind the desk, but this one was special, particularly seeing our community groups put their best feet forward on floats, wagons, and other types of displays, all bound by the one common purpose of celebrating our nationhood ? and, for a guy who has always been a sucker for pomp and circumstance, the marching bands and equestrian processions were the icing on the cake.

I went back to my desk not only with a spring in my step, but my patriotic internal battery charged up for whatever the fates ? well, certain individuals and bodies ? have in store for us at this decidedly unpredictable time.

One thing that is more predictable is how the nation's birthday party unfolds in the nation's capital. Sure, there might be some location changes here and there as renovation work on Parliament Hill continues apace, but we know that we're guaranteed a good show and some pointed messages from Canada's leaders that often inspire.

?158 years ago, a few provinces bet on the idea that they'd be stronger together than they ever could apart,? said Prime Minister Mark Carney in a statement issued on the morning of July 1, the first sentence setting the tone for the next few months ahead where Canadians might be reasonably united against trade aggressions from the United States, but, internally, unity is a more complex question.

?Our shared history has been marked by inflection points,? he continued. ?Moments where Canada has had to step up ? on the battlefield of Vimy, on the beaches of Normandy, in the homes of Gander after 9/11. Now, we face another such moment. The world is changing. Old friendships are fraying, our economy is being buffeted by a trade crisis, and our values are being tested by attacks on democracy and freedoms.

?In a more divided and dangerous world, Canadians are uniting. Together, we will build one Canadian economy ? connected by major projects, powered by Canadian energy, transformed by Canadian technology, and crafted by Canadian workers. Together, we're breaking down barriers across the country so you can buy Canadian everywhere and work anywhere. Together, we'll rebuild, rearm, and reinvest in our Armed Forces ? because Canadian leadership is defined not only by the strength of our values, but also by the value of our strength.?

An appropriate first Canada Day message from a reasonably fresh Prime Minister, perhaps one that was a little bit more of a challenge to get across as we all ride the emotional rollercoaster of dealing with the trade threat from Washington, knowing that as

soon as we take two steps forward, we have to be braced for being kicked a few steps back with new reasons, real or imagined, getting in the way of a deal.

In the face of such nonsense, we have to control what we can control and breaking down these interprovincial barriers ? no matter how great or how marginal the benefits of doing so might be, depending on the study you subscribe to ? can only be a step in the right direction.

As much as the Prime Minister focused on the political issues of the day ? not unexpected for our Head of Government ? the message delivered by Governor General Mary Simon, the representative of our Head of State in Canada, hit just the right note for me, although admittedly, the reasons why didn't rise to the top immediately.

?Today, I want to share what I like about Canada,? Simon began, stating that kindness is a thread that binds us together, underscoring her sentiment by sharing the Inuit word ?Ajuinnata,? which, she said, means ?you have perseverance in the face of adversity.?

?When we commemorate our soldiers, when we see our athletes compete, or students graduate ? I see Ajuinnata. It's part of Canada's story and one of the reasons we're all here today. In Canada, we stand for respect. We stand for an equal and compassionate society, where everyone belongs. We work together to improve and protect this beautiful creation called Canada. And when we include everyone, humanity is better for it.?

Indeed it is, and while that sentiment resonated strong enough, at the end of the day, what struck me was Simon's determination to share what she ?likes about Canada.?

Given how much grumbling we've seen lately, coming straight out with a ?What I like about Canada? speech was as simple as it was novel.

In our last Federal election, we heard so much about what was apparently wrong or allegedly ?broken? in Canada. Any time we log onto the internet, let alone our social media platforms at large, the algorithms in play never fail to serve up steaming piles of dissatisfaction, some of which has merit, but most of which, in my view, does not.

In my observation, particularly on social media, what's ?wrong? with Canada seems to be increasingly pitched accompanied by images of non-white individuals, simply going about their day, sometimes wearing clothing that does not fall within the narrow definitions of ?western.?

?What's wrong?? you might ask. Well, it seems the offending matter is simply difference. To hear them tell it, this alleged proliferation of ?different? is a phenomenon of the last five, ten, twenty or more years and the world, the say, is going to hell in a handbasket for it.

I don't know where these spleen-venters grew up in this country, but the world they're apparently nostalgic for is not a world I've experienced as a life-long Canadian who is now staring down the barrel of his 40th birthday.

What's changed, however, in my view, is tolerance and levels of vitriol that are causing so many to lose sight of the rich, diverse, Canadian tapestry.

That's one of the things I for one like about Canada ? a country that could not have been built without Ajuinnata, and will certainly not thrive without it.