

Dedicated leaders and extraordinary heroes

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

It arrived with minimal fanfare on Sunday, a far cry from similar anniversaries 10, 20, and even 45 years ago.

Thanks to the global pandemic and some alarming shifts in global affairs and public discourse, 2022 is a very different world compared to the everyday realities of 2012, 2002, and 1977.

2012 wasn't immune from seismic shifts in the decade that preceded it. If you put the 2002 yearbook side by side with that of 1977, it might be easier to point out the differences than the similarities. And yet, throughout it all, has been Queen Elizabeth II.

70 years ago this past weekend, upon the death of her father George VI, while she was on an official tour, spending the night in a treehouse overlooking the wild animals of Kenya as they gathered around a watering hole, Princess Elizabeth became Queen of this and many other countries.

While her accession to the throne was a global event, the very moment of the transition from one reign to the next, passed silently.

The Queen marked the 70th anniversary of her remarkable reign, her Platinum Jubilee, with a small reception just before the anniversary, spending the day itself quietly, privately, as she always has, in quiet contemplation of her father.

While it is easy to recognize February 6 as a celebration of her reign, it should be considered that, for Elizabeth II, it is also a day for a daughter to remember her father.

The Queen has often been lauded as a living symbol of continuity in a rapidly changing world, yet also a person who has balanced continuity with deftly shifting and evolving with the times, perhaps even pivoting, to serve her people.

"I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and to the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong," said Princess Elizabeth in a broadcast from South Africa to mark her 21st birthday in 1947.

The aforesaid "imperial family" has come and gone, replaced with the Commonwealth Family of Nations, yet she remains, an historic, and dare I say iconic, figure who somehow remains as relevant today as ever.

Take, for instance, global speech our Head of State made in April 2020 when the world was still grappling with a virus keeping us all indoors, an invisible enemy of which we knew precious little.

At a time of uncertainty and fear, a time when words from our politicians were doing equally precious little to comfort the masses, millions of people from around the world were compelled to gather around their televisions, their radios, and their devices to hear their monarch. They might not have been able to pinpoint just why they felt the need to take it in, but feel it they did.

"Together we are tackling this disease, and I want to reassure you that if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it," she said. "I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge.

"Across the Commonwealth and around the world, we have seen heartwarming stories of people coming together to help others, be it through delivering food parcel and medicines, checking on neighbours or converting businesses to help the relief effort. And though self-isolation may at times be hard, many people of all faiths, and of none, are discovering that it presents an opportunity to

slow down, pause and reflect, in prayer or meditation.

?While we have faced challenges before, this one is different. This time, we join with all nations across the globe in a common endeavour. Using the great advances of science and our instinctive compassion to heal, we will succeed, and that success will belong to every one of us. We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again.?

Her message was universal and one, it seemed, many leaders felt difficult to articulate. But this was not the Queen's first kick at the can. Time, wisdom and experience came together to reassure people on a very different level than our other leaders ? and judging from the response I saw from even some unlikely quarters on how these words moved them both tears and resolve, it couldn't have been firmer on point.

After nearly 70 years on the throne and, yes, ensconced in the safety of her ?bubble? within a castle, she was, in my view, never closer to citizens of her realms or closer to the pulse of everyone throughout the Commonwealth.

Elizabeth II is an extraordinary woman who has reigned through extraordinary times. She continues to do so through times that were, perhaps, never more extraordinary than they are now. As such, this extraordinary anniversary, in my view, should be marked in extraordinary ways throughout our communities, whether through public art, infrastructure improvements, facilities dedications, or even the establishment of scholarships and bursaries in her name.

In the Golden and Diamond Jubilees, the Government of Canada followed the lead of the United Kingdom by issuing commemorative medals to honour unsung community builders and the everyday heroes around is.

As we still work towards coming out of our extraordinary public health circumstances, I personally can think of no better way to mark this extraordinary milestone of, yes, an extraordinary leader by creating a medal in her name to honour the extraordinary heroes who have worked tirelessly each and every day for the past two years to keep us safe, fed, and employed.

It's often said that true superheroes don't have to wear capes. True superheroes don't have to wear crowns, either. What we have seen over the past 24 months is that our superheroes also wear medical scrubs, they wear aprons, they wear grocery store name tags accompanied by creatively-personalized PPE, and they even sport wrinkles in the seats of their pants, a testament to their long hours behind the wheel to keep our supply chains flowing.

Last week ended with a dire warning from Toronto police to our frontline heroes ? our tireless and dedicated doctors and nurses ? to avoid wearing anything that gave away their profession lest they be attacked with any form of abuse from a small group of individuals in Toronto apparently intent on ending public health mandates.

It's a far cry from where we were in the spring of 2020 when such uniforms were almost universally celebrated and before the rainbows that decorated our windows, so movingly described by the Queen in her April 2020 address, sadly dried up.

To honour an extraordinary woman and her extraordinary reign, I can't think of a better tangible way to honour our Platinum-plated frontline heroes than a medal in her name.

It's not too late to make it happen.