

Going a step beyond mere thanks and gratitude

by BROCK WEIR

This weekend, many of us will be gathering around dinner tables with family and friends to share in the act of Thanksgiving.

With the last two-and-two-third years of the global pandemic behind us, and with four or five boosters coursing through us, we will most likely take our seats sure in the knowledge that we have a lot for which to be thankful and, of course, in the feeling there's less risk doing so.

First and foremost, we're here; it may have felt somewhat of a crap shoot at the start of all this whether or not we would be here by the time Thanksgiving 2022 rolled around, but here we are.

Second, most of us are lucky enough to have loved ones close enough by that we can gather, restore bonds, share a meal, memories, and goals for the future.

Third, if you're so fortunate, you will have a table groaning under the weight of traditional delicacies that are as unique as the family or friend group celebrating.

But, alas, many are not fortunate enough to have such a laden down table. Some do not have a table to share with others. Sadly, all too many don't have family and friends close at hand to share in the fellowship and, saddest of all, many of us didn't fare as well during the international turmoil we have all experienced.

Looking at it through this lens, whatever your circumstance, we have a lot to be thankful for indeed, but we should always be cognizant of those for which giving thanks in the ways we've become accustomed to at this time of year is an all too difficult process.

One thing I'm always thankful for, in the so-called 'before times' and even now in whatever we're calling this latest iteration of the 'new normal', is just how cognizant our communities are of this reality which can sometimes be difficult to perceive, let alone accept.

Communities have used the last few weeks to improve the lot of their fellow person, whether they have donated a few items to a local food bank, coordinated a drive for the same cause in their school or workplace, or even volunteered their time to help sort and/or distribute donations of all manner for the common good.

Some families, when they take their place around the dinner table, take a moment in turns to express what they're grateful for in general or over the last year. My family doesn't follow this particular tradition, but it's always interesting to see what bubbles to the surface when you do take a moment to think about it.

As bits and pieces of the tree canopy gracefully fluttered down onto my head on last Friday's sunny afternoon, I couldn't help but feel pre-emptively, if cautiously, grateful for where I was.

The blazing reds, oranges and yellows from the aforementioned tree canopy provided a beautiful frame for Aurora Town Park as people gathered, many in shades of orange not too far removed from the outgoing foliage, to reflect, remember, and pay tribute to survivors of the Residential School system and the thousands who tragically didn't make it home.

Now in its second year, I find it interesting that this National Day for Truth & Reconciliation fell so close to Thanksgiving.

Granted, Canadian Thanksgiving, while still ostensibly a time to celebrate a bountiful harvest, has a somewhat less troubling origin

story than its November counterpart in the United States, regardless of the imagery related to the holiday our American cousins have bombarded us with. Yet, as a person of European descent, hearing the stories of survivors and those directly impacted by the atrocity, so close to our edition of the holiday, really helps put gratitude into perspective.

Hearing these very difficult memories might make some of what we would normally express gratitude for this month ring somewhat hollow, make the simple pleasures of life we take for granted feel just a little bit more poignant, or put many of the trials we've each gone through into some much-needed perspective.

On Friday, I found myself feeling grateful that we're now in a place as Canadians ? mature enough as a country, perhaps ? to have serious conversations about where we are as a nation, how far we've come, and what needs to be done to pave the path of true reconciliation towards a better collective future.

I'm grateful, that no matter how difficult it might feel, that our eyes have been opened to Canadian history, past and all too recent, in its full spectrum, warts and all; that the tales we've been raised with of Canada being a country of peace and equity from time immemorial might not actually have been the case; that despite what we tell ourselves, we really don't have a blemish free morality high horse to ride compared to other nations; that as much as we celebrate our achievements as a country, and there are many, there are very important historic and lingering issues that require our desperate attention; that there is still much work to do.

Maybe this year, instead of simply stating how grateful we are for the people in our lives or the how certain experiences that happened over the last 12 months since we last convened for Thanksgiving dinner made us better people, we can go one step further and commit ourselves to at least one action on the road to Truth & Reconciliation.

?We as a society must speak up when we see things happen that are not fair, just, or respectful to Indigenous peoples,? said Indigenous educator Jan Beaver at Friday's observance in Aurora. ?That is our responsibility, all of us. I am happy to see more and more that people are learning, they're seeking knowledge, they're seeing understanding, they're developing relationships with Indigenous people, they're listening to stories.

?I see it more and more and that gives me hope ? that gives me a lot of hope that on days like today this is happening in many, many cities and towns across Canada and I am happy for that because, finally, to me, once we bridge to each other as human-to-human, person-to-person, friend-to-friend, that's where change is going to happen and I am really, really hopeful about how we're moving forward on this.

?As Murray Sinclair said, ?It has taken us all seven generations to get into this mess and it will take us seven generations to correct it if there's a will to do it.' I carry within my heart and spirit a vision for the future, seven generations from now, a future of healthy, sustained Indigenous nations all across this country called Canada.?