

Hope springs eternal ? but that ain't easy

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

It's often said that some people believe if they repeat something loud enough, and often enough, that some people will find a grain of truth therein ? or, at the very least, you'll be able to convince enough people of it.

While it might seem like a world away right now, it wasn't really all that long ago that then-U.S. President George W. Bush stood on the deck of an aircraft carrier to unveil a red-white-and-blue'd banner proclaiming ?Mission Accomplished!?

Some bought into the message, but thankfully far more people saw this as a public relations exercise at best or, at worst, a very dangerous game of wishful thinking.

As the war raged on, the image almost became synonymous with some of the most bumbling acts of a bumbling eight-year administration. It was, of course, nearly 20 years before U.S. troops left Afghanistan, in another bungled exercise, the mission being anything but accomplished.

I can't help but think that 20 years from now we'll be looking back at the times we're living through as now our own ?Mission Accomplished? moment.

It's been a few weeks since Premier Ford lifted most of the remaining public health restrictions, including mask mandates in the vast majority of possible settings. Ford, of course, isn't the only Canadian premier to have done this very thing, but in keeping our focus strictly on Ontario, it feels as if many politicians and residents alike seem to think that COVID was ended with the stroke of a pen with a little extra flourish from a magic wand.

The pandemic rages on, yet politicians and many Ontarians seem to be of the mindset that we're now living in a ?post-COVID? world. This as the Province sees significant spikes in new cases, with very little formal testing, few resources, and essentially shifting isolation and quarantine rules over to the honour system.

What could possibly go wrong?

Well, we know the answer.

New modelling has taken out the guesswork. So has our collective experience of the last two years.

Easter is a season of hope and renewal and that's something that will sustain us for a while, if nothing else. But as this observance approaches I find myself looking more and more back to the first such holiday of the pandemic with a degree of sentimentality.

Mine is a family that, for better or worse, takes such occasions very seriously and, like most everyone else, 2020 was the first Easter gathering I could remember that didn't involve a reunion of some kind.

Instead of the traditional dinner with the full cast of characters, it was a fish and chip dinner for three as we socially isolated and decided to dine local with some takeout. Togetherness was achieved through a brief Zoom call, but it didn't go very far in fostering those warm and fuzzy feelings.

By the second COVID Easter, expectations were more or less managed.

A similar gathering of three took place, but the Zoom get-together simply didn't happen as we'd settled into our new normal and found new ways throughout the year to renew the ties that continue to bind.

This time, although many gatherings are set to return almost as normal, it will be more of the same here. I'm not, of course, wistful for those early terrifying days of the pandemic when so much was unknown and there was a genuine fear that even a walk outdoors could bring something unwanted into the home. Instead, I'm thinking about those early days of rediscovering what community is all about.

It was difficult not to cast my mind backward on a trail walk last week.

As Easter approached in 2020, a stroll along the same path had a few more pops of colour along the way as countless residents dusted off their paint brushes and grabbed some rocks and stones to leave poignant messages of hope and solidarity for every passer-by.

This was a trend that continued through Easter of 2021 with dozens more rocks of hope now augmented with similarly emblazoned seashells dangling from tree branches by colourful ribbons or near-invisible fishing line.

Not so last week. Most of the rocks had, one can only surmise, been collected by their creators, souvenir hunters or carried away by the elements ? one or two I could see catching the light of the sunset underneath the surface of a river ? and what was left was only memories.

So too, it feels, is the solidarity in our community in the face of an invisible enemy: mere memories.

It was a period of moving armadas of vehicles passing by our local hospitals with signs of strength to and appreciation for the doctors, nurses, and other frontline workers keeping us safe. Now, tragically, these very same heroes are all too often subject to abuse and resentment by people who are either misinformed or myopic.

It was a time when the world was collectively rooting for doctors and scientists who almost uniformly dropped what they were doing to focus their considerable knowledge and talents in developing a vaccine that would help bring an end to the horrors we were all experiencing. Now, in some quarters, these very same people are sadly derided, condemned, or swept into ludicrous conspiracy theories by individuals who have been caught on a downward slope made slick from the snake oil still being peddled through Drs. Facebook and YouTube.

Although there was still so much information yet to uncover, it was a time when the rules were clear and those who refused to follow them ? not, mind you, the ones who were unable to follow them, and there's a very clear difference ? were called out. On the other hand, it was also a time when those who were following the rules were subject to not-insignificant abuse from the scofflaws. Now, we're living in an era where we're encouraged every day to bend over backwards to accommodate the same people, even if it means being locked into an unending cycle of public health setbacks.

Don't mind me if this Easter season I am more than a little bit sentimental for the days of cooperation, unity and common sense ? not to mention the hope that an actual post-COVID world, perhaps even a resurrection of life prior to March of 2020, seemed like a relatively short-term goal and the mission would be accomplished sooner rather than later.

Where can I borrow that pen and wand?