

?How rude!?

by BROCK WEIR

Donny Osmond and his fellow musical brothers once waxed lyrically ? quite literally ? about one bad apple spoiling the whole bunch.

Bunch, bushel, or basket ? the favourites of the 60s and 70s weren't wholly original with their musings, but I think we've all encountered a bad apple or two (or six or seven) in our lives. Yet do they really spoil the whole quart or peck? Well, only if you let them.

I'm sure you all have your stories.

One that always sticks out in my mind was Canada Day 2010.

It was particularly hot that July, the heat generated by the G20 Conference in Toronto earlier that week notwithstanding, and doing our best to prepare for the conditions, my mother and I set out for our nation's capital for the Parliament Hill festivities.

This wasn't an ordinary year over which the ceremonies would be presided by then-Governor General David Johnston and Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Rather, it was led by Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on what turned out to be their last visit in Ottawa.

Finding our place along the crowd barriers around 4.30 a.m., we thought we had a prime spot.

But, as the hours rolled on, and the moment of our monarch and her consort's arrival grew closer, it felt gradually less ?primo.?

The crowds closed in and there was barely enough room to shrug a shoulder, but we acclimatized to this temporary ?new normal? and enjoyed the pomp and circumstance of the royal arrival.

The departure, however, was a slightly different story.

After Queen Elizabeth shook hands with a group as disparate as The Barenaked Ladies and Christopher Plummer and made her way down from the stage to ground level, I felt a strange rustling along the side of my leg. I looked down and found the source of the rustling was another leg.

Dressed in athletic wear and sneakers, the leg belonging to a woman behind us crept further and further up the crowd barrier until she wedged her ankle into a niche in the gate and stood there, leg aloft, not unlike Molly Shannon's iconic Saturday Night Live character, Sally O'Malley, just waiting for her moment.

Having stood our ground for the better part of six hours, I didn't think it was unreasonable to hold our position, but this woman had other ideas as, by the time the Queen and Prince Philip prepared to pass us, she attempted to use the leverage from her ankle to quite literally vault herself between us, presumably stopping short of going straight overtop the royal couple.

?I want to see the Queen,? she said in exasperated tones as if the rest of the 500,000 people there didn't have the same objective, and became increasingly objectionable.

In other circumstances, the woman's rudeness may have spoiled the experience. But, as luck would have it, it did not ? and it added an extra-colourful element to the story.

Last week, the Canadian brand of rudeness came into the fore when tutoring outfit Preply published a survey of 15,000 Canadian residents 'across 44 cities' to find out which Canadian community is 'the rudest and whether the stereotype of apologizing too much is true.'

'According to our findings, the three rudest Canadian cities are Vaughan, Coquitlam and Brampton,' said pollsters in their report of the results, perhaps eliciting a sigh of relief that our community didn't make the cut ' for better or worse.

We weren't exactly found to be bastions of politeness either, not cracking the Top 10 in either direction. But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves; it was a survey of only Canada's largest centres.

'Vaughan holds the unwelcome title of Canada's rudest city,' they concluded. 'It turns out the residents of the home to Canada's Wonderland might not be so wonderful. People here were almost three times as rude as people in the least rude city, Markham, despite only 20 km between them. Home to many commuters, Vaughan has become somewhat of a hub for traffic. This may be part of the reason why residents have become frustrated and why you're more likely to encounter people who won't wave a thank you if you let them merge here than anywhere else. Vaughan's neighbouring city, Brampton, likely makes it into the top three for similar reasons.

'On the other end of the country, Coquitlam comes in as the second rudest city. Coquitlam is known for being damp and having some of the steepest hills'which may leave residents feeling moody and less inclined to fulfill the polite stereotype.'

What made Markham rise to the top of civility, according to the poll? 'It's cultural richness and varied residents may contribute to them being the most tolerable and polite, unlike some of the other cities in the GTA,' they say, but I don't necessarily think Markham has the monopoly on cultural richness and variety of residents.

Shedding a bit more light onto the results of this innocuous poll was a top five list of behaviours considered rude. These included 'being absorbed by phone in public; being noisy in public; not letting people merge in traffic; not slowing down when driving near pedestrians; and not picking up dog faeces.' Other behaviours meriting special mention were closed off body language, not waving thank you when a car lets you merge into their lane, not saying thanks to your bus driver and other operators when leaving their vehicle, and not respecting personal space.

As far as studies go, it was an effective way for the company to advertise their services, but I couldn't help but think how smaller communities like ours would fare.

Our leaders often extol our 'small town charm' when the reality is our Town, as charming as it might be, is not a 'small town' anymore. But how far does 'charm' extend? Is it in our people, whether we measure it by character, diversity, or a mix of both? Is it in our remaining spaces of natural beauty? Some of the quaint or more modern examples of local architecture?

I don't think being absorbed by the phone, being noisy in gathering spots, closed off body language or not being courteous in public are the exclusive province of city slickers.

But, what do you think? How would we fare in a poll of mid-sized Canadian towns and cities?

Would there be anything that sets us apart as far as rudeness goes? Any ways we go above and beyond to be welcoming and courteous that's simply not found in the bigger, perhaps more impersonal cities?

Send your thoughts to brock@lpcmedia.ca.