

Lasting Images

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

When all is said and done, what will be the stories of the pandemic that will stick with you?

What will be the images front of mind years from now if and when another new variant appears on our horizon?

Who will be the people that you remember?

For the longest time, the stories, images and individuals I thought would stick with me the longest would be the positive ones.

They were the stories that illustrated the best of us; how we came together towards a common cause; how we found new ways of expressing ourselves; and how we took stock of the world that has always been around us, whether it was getting out and exploring our neighbourhoods when our personal spheres had to temporarily contract due to our global health crisis, or putting renewed focus on the importance of shopping local.

It was the story of the former British 'Land Girl' who answered the call during the Second World War and, now a nonagenarian, didn't hesitate to do so once again, mobilizing her community to collect much-needed items for a local food bank.

It was the story of a musically-passionate sibling duo who, once a week, transformed their driveway into a makeshift concert space for their friends and neighbours not only to collect items for that same food bank, but to raise awareness of the plight of frontline heroes like their nurse mom.

It was the story of a student bagpiper who, in an effort to keep his skills intact, decided to take his instrument, love the sound or hate it, onto his porch to perform a few songs every night at 7 p.m., in a show of solidarity with frontline healthcare heroes during shift changes.

It was the story of two sisters, who, as the first COVID summer started to wind to a close, debating back and forth with their parents on whether to return to in-class learning or stick with virtual sessions. But, in between long-running sessions of chin-wags, they took breaks to bring to fruition a crafty idea on how to make masks more comfortable for doctors, nurses, and teachers.

A few months ago, I was sure these would be the abiding images of my mind, this job giving me the privilege of telling their stories, and even preserving them for future generations who might want to take a deep dive into how their forebears coped with a once-in-a-century event.

Yet, here we are: the scenes from Ottawa, Windsor, and numerous other Canadian cities seared into our minds. Those scenes that were beamed around the world inspiring movements of their own in cities around the globe intent on pressuring the powers-that-be to end masks and vaccine mandates ? or so they claimed, at least in the beginning.

Don't get me wrong, I understand the originally stated intent of the effort. We're all frustrated. We would all like to see this behind us. Collectively, we might have different ideas on how we might get there.

Some might think following public health guidelines in an effort to drive down new cases might be the ticket, along with getting free vaccines to give us a fighting chance against something that is still such an unknown, upping our hand hygiene game, practicing social distancing, and generally practicing a little more consideration towards our fellow human.

Others, it seems, are of the opinion that making a city grind to a halt; welcoming some truly bad actors (a minority, to be sure) with apparent open arms; harassing the workers that are on the job to keep us healthy and safe; taking their kids, when it was once priority number one to get back into in-person learning, out of school for, what, three weeks now to join this cavalcade of 'freedom?'; and using their own children, many too young to even begin unravelling the complexities of the issue, to form a human chain to block international trade is the better way forward.

Maybe it's just me, but I still prefer the first path.

At the risk of heaping on another image some might consider negative, one additional story I will remember ? and I feel I will have to revisit as the pressure from the 'convoys' appears to be pressuring some of our Provincial leaders to expedite an end to our mask mandates ? is another mom who was doing her best to shine a light on the good pandemic works being carried out by her children.

Reaching out to us with pride to underscore their idea, she shied away from taking any of the spotlight as I talked to the kids on their patio while she popped her head out the door a few times to interject a detail.

She was one of the people who belong to a group that doesn't seem to be getting the focus they once did: the immunocompromised.

Her particular condition rendered her unable to get a vaccine, unable to wear a mask without considerable respiratory issues, and, in the second wave of the pandemic, unable to venture too far outside her home, and almost certainly beyond her bubble, back when bubbles were still in fashion.

As we fast forward into the veritable wild west of learning to 'live' with COVID now that we appear to be throwing up our hands to essentially give up the fight, how will our most vulnerable be fully able to enjoy their lives, not to mention the freedoms that people in our major cities, and their five-year-olds, are ostensibly fighting for?

Whatever plan we get for this stage of the game, or whether it is no plan at all, I hope people are considerate of those who, as a result, will be unable to participate in society as they once were, perhaps not at all.

Freedom isn't freedom unless there is freedom for all, and amid the cacophony that is coming out of the capital, that doesn't seem to be a concept that has truly taken hold, and politicians and law enforcement officials that have been sucked into this unwinnable whirlpool are not excepted.