

Nostalgia with a Zed

by BROCK WEIR

There's something to be said about nostalgia.

Regular readers of this column will know I have mixed feelings on the subject, but with each passing year I feel (and fear) I'm becoming more and more nostalgic in spite of myself. Well, maybe in spite of something else. And I don't think I'm alone.

I've never been one to yearn for a return to the so-called 'good ol' days' because the reality is the 'good ol' days' never really existed; however bucolic your childhood or those of your parents and grandparents might seem in your mind's eye, there was always something simmering in the background, even if you weren't conscious of it, to tarnish what you might see as the gold-standard of living.

If you look back wistfully of your mother taking a page out of the June Cleaver style book, doing her daily dusting, sweeping, and cooking in an uncomfortably starched dress, heels, and an elegant pair of pearls, that's fine, but then as now different women of different means and circumstances had very different situations and stories to tell.

If you have a framed photo of your parents, perhaps with your father's arm around your mother, in a luxuriously appointed restaurant or night club booth that looks the epitome of glamour, there were certain groups of people who were quite literally barred from having the same experience in the same environment.

Yet, the past never really loses its allure.

For example, we have a widely distributed television station in Southern Ontario that, after a number of rebrands over the last decade-or-so has found a winning formula as a 'retro' network, re-airing such classics as I Love Lucy, Hawaii Five-0, The Love Boat, and the like, with a welcome regularity.

This weekend, fans the world-over will be gathering in Chicago for the second annual Golden Con, a celebration of all things Golden Girls and of stars Bea Arthur, Betty White, Rue McClanahan, and Estelle Getty. The first year attracted thousands and this year is shaping up into an even bigger extravaganza of the 80s sitcom, which White described as being about 'four old broads' yet has a surprisingly young following.

There was even talk last week about a Hollywood studio securing the rights to remake Alfred Hitchcock's classic, Vertigo, with Robert Downey, Jr., in the role made so famous by James Stewart in 1958. Speaking as someone who thinks the original flick is pretty damned-near perfect, this is a step too far, but I digress?

Closer to home, last week saw a tentative reboot of the Zellers brand in select Hudson's Bay Company stores in the Greater Toronto Area and across the country. Although they have yet to hit our community, the announcement, and the subsequent branding, fuelled a wave of unlikely yearning among swaths of Canadians, particularly Canadians who grew up in the 1990s, even if Zeddy is yet to take their rightful place at the centre of it all.

'2023 has arrived, and with it, Zellers on the horizon,' said HBC in a press release back in January. 'Opening in communities across the country, the brick-and-mortar locations will complement the first-ever Zellers.ca ecommerce site, ultimately bringing Zellers to nearly every community in Canada.'

'Customers will be greeted with a thoughtful selection of design-led products across home décor, toys, baby, apparel, and pets, housed within Zellers' signature red and white that will guide customers along in their retail journey. One of HBC's most beloved brands, Zellers holds a special place in Canada's maple leaf-shaped heart. [Customers] can expect a helpful, playful shopping

experience packed full of low prices day in, day out. With a core focus on design and value ? and a hint of the nostalgia that Canadians know and love ? Zellers is gearing up to become the go-to, from lifestyle to home and almost everything in between.?

While Zellers was, like so many of us, a part of my childhood, maybe I'm lucky in that it's never really been that far away; my regular pharmacist became so while they worked at one of Zellers' red-and-white-spangled in-store drug stores; at their independent location today one of the first things you see on the counter is a figure of Zeddy presiding over continued commerce. But I realize others haven't had as ready access to this particular landmark along Memory Lane!

Maybe there's hope yet for a resurgence for other Canadian brands like Bi-Way, which is often mooted for a reboot, Bargain Harold's, Sam, the Record Man, and Hy and Zell's.

And yet, as much as I've harped on in this space over the years with my concerns about people yearning for a time that exists and existed only in hindsight, I feel with each passing year I'm succumbing more and more to the sentiment.

A simpler time? No.

A more ?genteel? time? Maybe.

A more respectful time? Hmm, I think we're getting warmer.

It's no shock to say we're living in a time that is, for many of us, more divided than ever before in living memory.

The times when opposing politicians, for example, could leave their polarized views behind in the House of Commons, Senate, Legislature or Chamber to go out and raise a pint together in fellowship, even friendship, sure in the belief they have done their best for their respective constituents, feels in so many respects an increasingly faded memory.

As do the times when elections Provincial and Federal, and particularly the elections south of the border, were NOT always ?the most important election of our lifetimes? and instead focused on substantive issues and a healthy exchange of fair viewpoints?rather than why a vote for the opponent would bring certain calamity for generations to come.

As are the times when being curious, compassionate, embracing and empathetic were accepted as or called what they are without being re-branded as ?woke? in quarters with little knowledge for that particular quartet of attributes; not to mention ads, commercials, and other forms of media representing the diverse makeup of this country facing accusations of ?becoming too political? rather than being reflective of our everyday reality.

Okay, I'm getting it this whole nostalgia thing. As we don't seem to be turning a page on any of that in the near future, maybe one of Zellers' new food trucks will hit our community soon so I can have a mental vacation and tuck into a Big Z burger while checking in with those ?four old broads? from Miami.