

Post-Turkey Thanks and Gratitude

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

Thanksgiving has come and gone and for that, in some small degree, I am kind of thankful.

Don't get me wrong; I love the holiday. I love getting together with family and breaking bread, enjoying the fall leaves outdoors before heading inside for a lovely and satisfying meal and reflecting on what we truly have to be grateful for.

But the small degree of gratitude that it is all over stems simply from the fact that this time around there were more than a few unknowns.

The reality is that with two very quick and distanced exceptions with one individual, this was going to be the first time seeing my extended family since Christmas of 2019.

It is often said that a week is a long time in politics, but try a year-and-a-half in family dynamics with a global pandemic as an extra variable.

COVID-19 has changed many people. Some of us have done battle with the so-called Quarantine 15. Others have become used to being in the same four walls over the last year-and-a-half and the idea of being around a larger group, albeit people who are united by family ties, could seem stressful or daunting.

On the flipside, individuals who have been staring at the same four walls day in and day out were equally as likely to be itching to get out and be amongst their loved ones come hell or high water.

But whether we like to admit it or not, COVID has changed us in ways we might not even realize yet. We might not have the same priorities as we once had after more months than we care to think about collectively fighting an invisible enemy.

What was once important might now pale in comparison to something we hadn't even thought about before March of 2020. Months of isolation might have taken its toll, as could the endless barrage of misinformation that lurks around every corner we turn online. Zoom, Facetime and the good old trusty telephone have been great ways of staying in touch over the course of the pandemic, but as much as it has provided a window on our loved ones, it is less likely to be a window into the mind and soul as a face-to-face meeting.

Weeks before we set out for our family gathering it was made clear by the host that the rules of the game had changed in light of COVID-19 ? even before guidelines were handed down at the eleventh hour last week by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

In our family, a relatively small family at that, it was made clear right from the outset that if you weren't double vaccinated by at least the requisite 14 days before the gathering that you would not be allowed through the door, a factor that was unfathomable the last time we sat around the table.

Thankfully, the vast majority of our family was way ahead of the game. Just one person and their partner were sitting on the sidelines ? and content to do so at that! ? declining to roll up their sleeves for reasons best known to them. Not even the promise of a beautiful turkey dinner was enough to entice them to do their civic duty to themselves and others. More for the rest of us!

So, having a general idea of who would be there and who wouldn't be joining us, we set out for the family gathering.

Held in a condominium, we had to wear masks, of course, as we made our way to the correct door on the 18th floor; a new experience for sure, but one that provided comfort knowing that the building was still taking the threat of virus seriously.

Yet once we arrived, opened the door and took off our respective masks, the most curious thing happened. While most of our COVID-19 experiences have seemed like milestones on a rather arduous journey, being around family again seemed like almost no time at all had passed and we had collectively simply pressed 'pause' on life until it was safe to resume again without skipping a beat.

While we have overcome so many challenges throughout the pandemic, the sensation of picking up basically right where we left off from our last pre-COVID Christmas was a very welcome one, and a sensation that had been all but forgotten in the intervening months.

For that, I am thankful - and, perhaps I am alone here, I am thankful that the unknowns that preceded this are behind us. At least for now.

And it can be, if we all continue to do our parts.

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday and found many reasons to be thankful.

THANKFULNESS ON THE SMALL SCREEN

It might seem unusual to also express post-Thanksgiving gratitude for something on the small screen, but here we are.

Television shows, whether they are given the traditional broadcast treatment these days or streamed onto our TVs or devices on any number of services, are a dime a dozen these days. But there is one exception I would like to give a shout out to this week.

Regular readers of this column will know that I am a long-time fan of *I Love Lucy*, which first reached audiences across North America 70 years ago this Friday.

I Love Lucy continues to make generation after generation laugh but, from a personal standpoint, and I know from social media that I am far from alone in this, it has also provided significant comfort over the course of COVID-19.

On a further personal note, as someone who has been actively involved in the 'fandom' since the tender age of 11, *I Love Lucy* has led me to individuals who I have been able to count as true life-long friends. It was a game-changer for a shy and awkward tween, and has stood me in good stead for decades since with no signs of slowing down.

So, I would like to close out with thanks to Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, Vivian Vance, and William Frawley, original writers Bob Carroll, Jr., Madelyn Pugh Davis, and Jess Oppenheimer, and all the cast and crew for the lightning they captured in a bottle.

It changed their lives and there is no doubt from my perspective that it changed mine for the better.

Happy anniversary!