

Reason enough for jubilation

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

Sunday's glorious weather was a great time to take stock of where we have been over the last 15 months ? and, indeed, where we are going.

As the sun beat down in the early afternoon, I grabbed a book in which I haven't made nearly the dent that I would have liked since the start of the spring, and headed to a local park in the hopes of polishing off a few chapters of the tome.

Although I flipped over a respectable number of pages, I don't think I made quite the impact I was hoping. I was distracted instead by what was before me ? and what was not.

It was not the first time I had been to that park. The first time was near the end of the first wave and going there almost felt like an act of defiance. Against what, I don't know. It wasn't in violation of stay-at-home orders, getting outdoors for exercise was encouraged, as it is now, but still?there was a feeling that I was flouting something.

Anything.

As you can appreciate, those early days were weird times mired with uncertainty.

This time, however, there was a sense of comfort: a comfort in knowing what to expect, what is expected, and maybe even a satisfaction of what we have been able to overcome establishing new ground rules in our day-to-day lives.

The walk to that elusively perfect spot was also markedly different. The last time around, social distancing didn't come as easily, and it was something for which you had to catch yourself almost every time someone appeared over the crest of a hill coming in your direction. Now, it feels fairly normal and natural, and not the source of stress or anxiety it once was.

Seated in place, I was struck by the new rhythm that was all around.

Wildlife paying no heed to the human folk below, birds sang overhead while people went about their business: persons cycling in their household groups, a father playing catch with his son while another family showed off their moves on the soccer pitch a safe distance away, each exchanging a word or a joke whenever a ball ? baseball or soccer ? went astray, friend groups forming their own socially-distanced circles on the grass, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

But, of course, it is hardly the most natural thing in the world; we have learned a lot over these trying times. The very fact that it seemed natural was a testament to how far we have come and the hope that lies ahead.

Monday marks Victoria Day, a holiday that means different things to different people.

For the more constitutionally-minded amongst us, it is a very important day with significant historic roots. For those lucky enough to have them, it is the traditional weekend to open up the cottage and spend the first long weekend around the water. For others still, it is the unofficial start of the summer season, a time when we're finally free of the meteorological uncertainty that is part and parcel of the winter and spring seasons, and can look forward to a steady supply of sunshine and warmth ahead through at least September.

But now I think we can all agree that Victoria Day will usher in a bit more hope and amp up that proverbial light at the end of the tunnel that everyone is talking about.

May 24 was the goalpost set by the Province of Ontario where all individuals 18 years of age or older will be eligible to book their first doses of COVID-19 vaccines, but this line was moved up to May 18 this week due to early shipments of the vaccine.

As the pace of Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine rollout continues to accelerate with 2.2 million doses scheduled to arrive this week, the government is extending booking eligibility to mass immunization clinics to individuals aged 18 and over, said the Province on Monday. This high number of doses is due to an early delivery of the week of May 24 shipment to accommodate the long weekend, and is an opportunity for the Province to offer an appointment to receive the vaccine to more Ontarians ahead of schedule.

Few announcements from the Provincial Government, which came just a few days after tentative plans were put in place to get shots to youth between the ages of 12 and 17, were likely greeted as warmly as this one, and with good reason: As soon as individuals 18-plus are able to get their first shots in arms, not only will those who fit the demo finally know when they can begin counting down the days to a welcome return to normalcy, parents and grandparents whose time came weeks and even months ago will finally be able to breathe a long-awaited sigh of relief.

In short, we can finally move forward together.

On a personal note, I was able to exhale a couple of weeks ago when a pre-existing medical condition finally did me some good after 18-odd-years and, on the recommendation of my doctor, I was able to get my first shot.

When my date was finally secured, I felt a potent mixture of hope and fear but not fear of getting the shot, but that circumstances would once again shift and my booked appointment, a date that will stick out in my mind for many years, would be all for naught and the process would have to start all over again.

Thankfully, when the day came, everything went without a hitch and my shot had a very important side effect: elation. Elation tempered with guilt; guilt that I was able to experience this exhilaration just before others in my age bracket. When people asked if my turn had come, I was reluctant to answer in one way or another, lest the person posing the question was unable to receive theirs due to their age or any number of circumstances.

Now, in just a few days, any adult who wants a vaccine will be able to book one. Above and beyond celebrating the monarch, the opening of a cottage, or the imminent arrival of summer, this is reason enough for jubilation.