

Remembering in Discomfort

by BROCK WEIR

Remembrance Day services are always, in my view, a spectacular sight.

I've been a life-long sucker for pomp and circumstance, so the bands and pipers (bag and otherwise) that participate each year, not to mention the associated parades, and uniforms that have been cleaned-up and buttons polished to levels only seen at this time of year, is a perfect storm.

But it's not just pomp and circumstance solely for the sake of pomp and circumstance; it's potent, poignant, and never fails to lose its power.

This sight, unchanged in so many ways since the end of the First World War, had extra power this year due to circumstances well beyond our control.

The sheer number of people who gave their all to attend ceremonies on Tuesday, and those held over the weekend, despite a deep freeze and snow blowing in all directions, was a testament to how proud we are of the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice for King, Queen and Country. It was also reflective of the pride we have in the men and women who served, experienced the horrors taken in by the fallen but, mercifully, came home to share their stories.

As impressive as the numbers were given the unseasonable weather of the past few days, however, I often wonder just how many more people might turn out if not for any number of circumstances.

Sure, there are those who are unable to get out and mark the occasion privately, or, if they're living on a congregate setting, in services ably spearheaded by residential staff to allow their residents to Remember ? and a special shout out goes to teachers and education support staff who go above and beyond to help students Remember in-class as well.

But there are other circumstances, too.

Some might say such services glorify war and conflict; well, talk to anyone who has served and you'll likely say otherwise.

Some might argue that there aren't enough hours to take out of the workday to make the effort; first of all, the men and women who served might have learned a word we can't print in this newspaper to refute that, but, regardless, there are almost always ways to remember on the weekends.

Yet, for others, it's a matter of discomfort.

I know there are members of our communities who don't turn out for very personal reasons. Perhaps they had a beloved parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, who served and the aforementioned power and potency of such ceremonies are simply too much for them.

Others still might find the music that so often accompanies such services too evocative of events in their past, at funerals, for instance, and would prefer to ride out these emotions in privacy.

Fair enough.

While I respect each person's individual reasons for not coming out for such occasions, to me it invariably seems like such a missed opportunity.

I'm also reminded of an experience I had many years ago when, as a loved one's life ebbed towards its close, some members of their family were reluctant to come and say their final farewells.

Saying goodbye is always difficult, and that goes without saying, but their reason for staying away often surprised me: they preferred to remember the loved one as they were in their prime, not as they were as their time came to an end. That certainly didn't help anybody and, when you can provide comfort at no cost to someone you love when they need it the most is, in my opinion, peak selfishness.

And, again, a missed opportunity.

There is some value in discomfort.

At last week's recent induction ceremony for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2025, some of the honourees touched upon the lessons they learned in taking a loss on the field, on the rink, or whatever their arena, if you'll pardon the pun, happened to be.

Losing is never a comfortable experience, but it's one that you learn from and, hopefully, propels you forward.

Political circumstances here at home, south of the border, and well-beyond have come together to inspire people who have never been engaged in politics before to step out of their comfort zones, put their opinions forward and, if not in writing, speaking before the public ? a hurdle that's difficult to clear in the best of circumstances.

Just last week, comedian Nikki Glaser hosted Saturday Night Live and certainly sparked a conversation. Her monologue, which touched upon several controversial topics, made many people uncomfortable ? and brought about the inevitable online backlash, as most things do these days ? but, if not laughing, it certainly got people talking.

Maybe, however, there a shift in the offing.

An October 13 article in the UK newspaper, The Independent, delved into the topic of whether or not trigger warnings, such as those at the start of a movie or news article that contain scenes which could adversely impact its consumers, are effective.

In her article, Rebecca Whittaker, cited a study which found ?flagging potentially distressing content may encourage people? to read or watch further.

?Almost 90 per cent of young people who saw a trigger warning still chose to view the content out of curiosity, whatever the source of the warnings, and irrespective of whether they suffered trauma. One person even told researchers: ?Sometimes my brain wants to be triggered, so it grabs my attention more.'?

More than 250 people between the ages of 17 and 25 participated in the study. It also found that whether or not the participant had trauma history or PTSD had little bearing in whether or not they were going to heed the warning.

?Although trigger warnings are there to signal care and consideration, the evidence suggests they do little to prevent exposure to distressing material. Instead, they may simply pique curiosity, leading users to engage with content they might otherwise have ignored.?

This is not to suggest in any way that people go and run roughshod over trigger warnings that might very well be relevant to their own experiences and their mental health, but simply to illustrate that comfort zones are highly individual and we are in control of whether or not we stay in them.

And how we Remember.

If you stay away from your local Cenotaph at this time of year solely because it might be an uncomfortable experience, perhaps 2026 is the year you step out of that comfort zone and take part in a remarkable example of community coming together for a common cause ? something that is becoming increasingly rare in this day and age.

The men and women we gather to remember certainly stepped out of theirs to serve, and so-called creature comforts were barely a thought ? aside, perhaps, from writing home about provisions and rations. Who knows, coming out next November might provide a valuable moment of catharsis.

For those who gathered on Tuesday and in the days that preceded it, it certainly wasn't a comfortable experience, either. But it completed the Act of Remembrance, and, I think we were all the richer for it.