

Revisiting what we leave behind

by BROCK WEIR

I've said it before and I'll say it again: writing in this column space can occasionally work against me.

There have been instances where I've voiced concern with a decision made by leaders and lawmakers at any one of our levels of government only to have, in the intervening day-and-a-half or so before this column is written and the day it arrives on most of your doorsteps, a drastic U turn that rendered my initial concerns null and void ? my concerns being assuaged serving as somewhat of a consolation!

There have been other instances where I've name-dropped someone, usually a figure of note, and almost invariably of a certain age, only to have them drop off this ?mortal coil? in the intervening 36 hours, give or take.

I haven't gone as far as to ponder whether or not I'm bad luck or tempting fate, maybe it is just luck of the draw, but it seems to happen with alarming regularity.

Last week, I focused on what we leave behind to be found by future generations.

Inspired by a CBC article in which experts in the field outlined how video games we enjoyed in the past, most often in the infancy of the medium where gaming systems fought for a foothold in the market only to be left behind by competitors as quickly as Betamax gave way to VHS and the HD-DVD format to BluRay.

Video games, it seems, are far from the only media to go the way of the proverbial dodo.

Some of us have stacks of VHS tapes we're holding on to for sentimental value without a readily available VCR or compatible TV to enjoy them.

We have banks of photos in our respective clouds of choice that rarely, if ever, see the light of day because we don't often think of printing them off because we get the instant gratification of seeing the results rather than having to go through the process of finding a photo lab.

We have important files we knew we had to keep for various reasons, including the just-in-case, that are stored on media that are either obsolete or, due to different factors, including environmental, now corrupted or unreadable.

And the less said about email and messaging the better, which has, in most cases, taken over from letter-writing, resulting in instant gratification but something altogether ephemeral that is going to weaken the historical record, but I digress ? I'm at the precipice of starting to repeat myself if you read last week's piece, so? the point. The less said, indeed!

No sooner had I finished writing about the above themes last Monday afternoon I had a call from a person I had never met before. She asked me to visit a person I have had the pleasure of covering in these newspapers for the better part of a decade, with their work going back much further and well beyond the first time I ever had newsprint rub off onto my fingertips.

Just a couple of days earlier they had entered hospice care and this out-of-the-blue phone call was on their behalf, inviting me over to the residential hospice for a chat.

While our interactions were largely limited to matters related to community, the initiatives they were involved in, and their own interesting life story, over ten years of these chats we came to realize that on many of the issues facing the community, the country, and the world, we were largely on the same page.

This call was another example of being on the same wavelength as they asked me to come over for a final interview.

Over the course of my career in this field, I can't recall going into an interview knowing that the subject had just a few days left on their life path. There has been an occasion where I have interviewed someone on a public matter only for their life to be cut unexpectedly and tragically short just a few days later, but this was very much a first in which the outcome was not only known but unavoidable.

Braced for several potential outcomes, I set out for where they were residing. I hadn't seen them since before the pandemic and wasn't sure what to expect, what condition they might have been in, and what their frame of mind might have been.

I needn't have been too braced.

At the end of their life, they were focused on the future and what they were ultimately going to leave behind. They took the time to make sure all the details were taken care of and that the metaphorical seeds they were sewing in those last few hours and days would germinate for years to come.

But maybe we weren't so sympatico in this particular instance.

The wavelengths might have been similar but rather than focusing on what we have now ? whether it's what we create, what we've written, the things we have accumulated, the memories we have captured ? theirs was a full stock of what they had now and what, if placed in the right hands, it could turn out to be.

In some ways, considering what we have today to leave behind for tomorrow might be an exercise that most benefits the ego, but in order for future generations to know where they're going, they need to know where they've been.

Last week's hospice conversation really drove home, however, that considering the leave-behinds that are less tangible today, those that have real potential in bearing fruit tomorrow, including providing the tools needed to discern the journey of yesterday and how it relates to the journey into the future, are just as essential for a well-informed and well-equipped population in the years ahead.