

Socks, Booze and Vintage Giving

by BROCK WEIR

This has been a challenging year for so many and given all we've collectively had to navigate throughout 2025, we have to celebrate the little wins.

One little win I was all too happy to celebrate over the weekend was a bright spot of sunshine on an otherwise grey and bleak Saturday ? and that was somehow finishing off my Christmas shopping with eleven days to spare.

That's not to say that I don't try to be a proactive person wherever possible, but life, as we all know, has a tendency to get in the way, especially at this time of year.

I don't know how anyone else tasked this year with getting me a gift is faring ? full disclosure: for our wider family, we operate on a Secret Santa system of giving ? but I hope they finished a good long while ago.

While I've never considered myself particularly hard to buy for, I've heard from more than a few people that I'm in the minority on that. Time and time again I'm told finding just the right gift to me is particularly challenging. I don't really understand why; after all, a good book, a bottled potent potable, or any number of things that happen to bear the iconic visage of Lucille Ball, always hit the right spot.

Heck, a good pair of socks? Sign me up!

Well, I guess I'm at that age.

I never could have anticipated as a child that a good, cozy, well-made pair of socks could get me as excited as the oversized novelty version hung from the mantle and stretched out by whatever Santa left as he passed by. Yet, every so often we surprise ourselves.

Socks, Lucy and/or something to drink. Easy-peasy.

But I guess that depends on what you want to imbibe.

One ?something to drink? I'd rather pass on at this point of time is bourbon. Never in my top five of potent potables, something apparently hopelessly off-trend, I didn't exactly suffer when the ?Elbows Up? philosophy saw such bottles removed from our shelves, but I was happy to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, tumbler-to-empty-tumbler with those who were.

And, if those shoppers happen to be comparatively parched compared to this time last year when Christmas parties and open bars were in full swing, I'm hoping they get a win sooner rather than later.

Earlier this month, the Province of Nova Scotia, a jurisdiction like Ontario where liquor sales are controlled by a Provincial body, and likewise joined Ontario in pulling U.S. alcohol off shelves at the start of the trade war, announced an innovative way to dispose of a great deal of what was put in storage.

Their approach was to offer \$14 million-worth of wine and spirits for sale, with proceeds benefiting organizations combatting issues surrounding food insecurity, including Feed Nova Scotia.

?We remain committed to a Team Canada approach to tariffs and trade,? said Premier Tim Houston. ?We will not be ordering any more from the United States once this inventory is gone. But Nova Scotians have already paid for this product. We don't want it to go to waste. That's why we're selling it and using proceeds to help those in need.?

Manitoba was quick to follow Nova Scotia's lead, with similar sales through Christmas Eve, and an estimated \$500,000 worth of revenue, benefiting charities helping food insecurity, Indigenous organizations, and children's charities.

Manitobans have been resilient against Donald Trump's tariffs and deserve some holiday cheer, said Premier Wab Kinew. We are offering people a chance to give back to the most vulnerable families during this holiday season.

Added Northern Relations Minister Glenn Simard: By offering these U.S. products during the holidays, Manitobans will have additional options for their family gathering while at the same time contributing to assistance for vulnerable Manitobans for whom the holidays can be a challenging time. We strongly believe that removing U.S. alcohol from the shelves is the right thing to do at a time when our economy is under attack from illegal tariffs. Rather than waiting for products to expire and be destroyed, they will now fund community organizations instead.

Yet, in Ontario, where so many organizations across the Province, and right here at the community level, are practically bending over backwards to make the season bright for as many people in need as they did in 2024 and 2023, the same moves are not being made.

As late as Monday, December 15, the Province insisted it had no plans to join Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and others in reducing the boozy stockpile for the greater good.

The argument against selling the U.S. stockpile for charity is not unsound, however, with the Premier and his Government arguing that doing so might deter people from buying locally-produced boozy alternatives this season.

That could very well be true but, at the end of the day, if people really, really want Kentucky Bourbon or Tennessee Whisky, locally-produced alternatives aren't going to cut it unless they're simply looking to pour out a bottle of rye into the asphalt to make some sort of statement.

Ahead of Giving Tuesday on December 2, an annual movement which benefited so many organizations that are the building blocks of our community, a report from CanadaHelps, a leading online donation and fundraising platform, provided some pretty stark statistics.

They reported the generosity gap is widening by income and younger Canadians aren't as likely to give.

Those earning more than \$150,000 a year account for half (49 per cent) of all donations a divide that continues to grow as affordability challenges persist, they reported. Almost a third of 18-35-year-old Canadians (27 per cent) haven't given to charity in the past five years six percentage points higher than the national average. People over the age of 65 contributed to half of all donation dollars in Canada in 2023.

Over the past 12 months, more than one in four Canadians haven't donated to charity (31 per cent), showing there's still a huge opportunity to inspire generosity.

There's no magic formula to inspire generosity, but there are plenty of opportunities to lead by example, and I fear Ontario with Christmas now, as of December 18, less than a week away missed the boat in making a real, practical difference this holiday season.

There's no end in sight to this trade war, so unless the powers-that-be get creative, what was taken off of shelves at the start of the year will only continue to collect dust. While I'm told many of these products improve with age, I'm not necessarily holding my breath we'll see a charity sell-off, even with a vintage premium, next year.

In the meantime, we can all raise a glass to those who have stepped up to help this year, from large scale donors, to individuals and

small collectives knitting and selling everything from toques and mittens, to those glorious aforementioned socks, to have as much of an impact as they possibly can.