

# The more things change?

by BROCK WEIR

The first chapter of a New Year is often one of introspection.

It's sometimes a time to reflect on the previous year as it settles into the history books, and sometimes these reflections help a person set some late-breaking resolutions.

If you happen to have a milestone birthday just ahead or just behind, this introspection can often get a bit deeper, reflecting on the last five years, the last decade, or more.

My own milestone birthday, which took place about four months ago and is barely visible in that rear-view, wasn't necessarily a time for looking back, although there was some time spent reflecting on what I intended to accomplish by the time the final digit age odometer flipped around to this particular zero, and what should be prioritized by the time the zero comes back around again. Still, I found myself with my eyes on the horizon.

But social media can sometimes make this a taller order.

No matter your platforms of choice, chances are you've seen scores of individuals doing the shallowest of deep dives into themselves.

The 2016 "Challenge" which is hardly herculean in the task at hand most often sees the individual post a photo of themselves today side-by-side with a photo taken a decade previously. Now, to be fair, many of the posted images in question mean different things to different people. For some, they represent a decade of change and growth. For others, the pictures-of-the-past represent a specific milestone, celebratory or difficult, that were part and parcel of 2016.

For others still, maybe even the slight majority, the compare-and-contrast can even be something of a fishing expedition that is, fishing for compliments about how well they've aged, or otherwise turned back the so-called hands of time in the ensuing decade.

Now, as someone whose hairstyle has changed very little since my father first took me to his elderly barber, a man who began taming his own tresses more than 25 years before, in the 1990s aside from the mass arrival of grey over the last five years, I didn't have much visual material to compare.

So, of course, I turned to the written word.

My first step was looking into some of the back issues of this newspaper.

This space here is one of the only places I express my views and I was curious to look back on some of the topics that were on my mind 10 years ago this month.

A cursory flip through some of the pages leading up to this one, I was struck by how many issues that were front-of-mind 10 years ago are still bandied about creative ways to preserve greenspace, how to secure greater autonomy for municipalities over upper levels of government, community heroes being recognized for achievements large and small, and particularly telling, a trifecta: supporting local business in the face of impending challenges south of the border, community groups and organizations teaming up to eradicate hate crimes and bias within our communities, and students finding avenues to speak out on the issues that matter to them, whether it was through visual art, the written word, or through challenging worldviews in spirited international debate arenas.

The sights and sounds of Times Square this time around were very recognizable, but there were very noticeable differences. I

wrote in early 2016 about spending New Year's Eve in New York City and, in a remarkable example of foresight and getting ahead of trends, comparing it to my first NYE in NYC a full decade before. In the lead-up to the Holiday Season, one of our very own columnists shared her initial plans to also travel to New York City for the celebration, only to scuttle them well beyond the embryonic stage after ISIS released a video their radicals apparently filmed in what was set to become the centre-stage for that evening's party. I wasn't prepared to let them spoil the party, so I continued on my merry way. A couple of hours before I set off to take in the action ? come what may ? I got a text from this individual recommending an extra layer of Kevlar to keep warm. Thankfully it wasn't needed.?

Ten years on from that experience, and 20 years on from the first, there are different threats in the air and different reasons to consider one's options when thinking about travelling to the United States, but, for many, that sense of trepidation remains.

Another instance that struck me in a further column of January 2016 ? accidentally eavesdropping upon a scene that, sadly, is unfolding ever more seldom these days.

?A shared glance. A subtle wink. A short, curt nod. You see these gestures in everyday life. Sometimes you might be on the receiving end of these signals and somehow, instinctively, you usually have the tools at your disposal to translate them into some reasonably useful information. They have spotted the same thing on the horizon. They are in on the joke. You have met before. These tools can often come in handy when observing interactions between others as well. Then there are other times when these tools fail you.

?You are thrown into something ? be it a situation, conversation, or another kind of exchange ? where you only have the sum of its parts and can't possibly hope to come anywhere close to holding the whole in your hands.?

One often finds themselves in this situation in this particular line of work, but this instance involved a gathering at a local library when two Second World War veterans who had participated in The Note To Self Project, a book combining beautiful portraits of individuals accompanied by letters they would have written to their younger selves.

Their conversation was jovial and from a short distance away I could hear they were trading stories, but I knew at the end of the day, however open they were in their experiences, these were experiences shared solely by the two men in the room.

The two men, one of whom was 102 at the time, had 200 years of shared experience between them, and the conversation was doomed to be impenetrable to everyone else in the room, but it was invaluable to overhear.

Once upon a time, we took the memories and experiences of people of this generation ? and the lessons we could learn from them ? for granted, now the chances to do just that are fewer and further between with each passing year. And, simply put, we're not the richer for it.

It's often said that the more things change, the more they stay the same ? and while that is true on the surface, if you scratch it deep enough, you can see the equation is a little bit more complex.

Comparing selfies, or even New Year's experiences, a decade apart might be fun, and it might even be an ego boost, but when it comes to deep dives, it's barely sticking a foot into the shallow end of the pool.

Let's dive a bit deeper this year.