

Tradition vs. Tradition

by BROCK WEIR

Everyone has their own special traditions that help get them into the holiday spirit.

A lucky few of us are in the holiday spirit year-round, brainstorming gift and party ideas as soon as the dust has settled on Boxing Day. Others, however, need the conditions to be just right.

Maybe the snow has to start flying in earnest before you can hear the distant sound of Jingle Bells in your head ? a silver lining for those of us in Simcoe County still digging out from the weekend's massive snow dump! ? or maybe the real signal for the start of the season is finding that perfect place for an heirloom ornament on an evergreen bough, real or fake.

Maybe that perfect thing to kick-start the merriment is the spirit of fellowship that comes with gathering with your neighbours to help light your community's collective Christmas tree, as experienced in Aurora on Friday evening.

If holiday is usually a time of stress for you, maybe you can't really lean into the spirit until your shopping is done or your office Christmas party is in the books, knowing you can now well and truly relax ? at least for a few days ? and give the yuletide the attention it deserves.

Perhaps your holiday spirit is triggered by the senses, whether it's hearing a favourite character, sampling a culinary tradition unique to this time of year, or getting that singular whiff that only comes from a freshly cut tree or a simmering pot of mulled cider or wine.

I've always been a big fan of Christmas, and that often starts with the putting up the tree in the latter half of November and opening that exciting first door on the advent calendar at the start of the month.

While the tree is not up yet for various reasons, a highlight of this past Sunday was opening up that first door. Now, we're spoiled for choice these days when it comes to advent calendars. Most of us who have used our fingers to perforate that sometimes hard-to-open cardboard flap have a sentimental attachment to that distinctly chalky chocolatey nugget that advent calendars have pushed for generations; I've graduated myself to something a little more adult ? craftier chocolate, mind you, not one of those groovier numbers that offer a shot of 24 different tipples. But, in doing so, I have inadvertently started a new tradition with some of my favourite youngsters in California.

Last fall, I visited one of my closest friends in Los Angeles and, as a gift, brought her three children a calendar from one of our more upscale chocolate emporiums. As the kiddos' ages range from one-and-a-half to sixteen-going-on-seventeen, I figured chocolate would be the one thing to satisfy all three sets of tastebuds, and I wasn't wrong.

?This is the best chocolate ever,? one of the three opined, so it was clear that even though I wasn't bound for California this time around, a tradition worth maintaining had started.

As it's a bit of a crunch time around here, my mom was kind enough to pick up this year's calendar ? just as the Canada Post strike hit. Reluctant to give in and just send it off via courier, as we were bound for a day trip to the States a short time later, Plan A became bringing it with us to post from upstate New York. The day we were there, however, our designated post office closed exceptionally early, so that was that.

Plan B, which should have been Plan A, was a trip to a local courier.

Admittedly, my initial hesitation was the cost of such a service, but was pleasantly surprised my imagination had vastly inflated

reality. Not only that, they had the perfect-sized box to fit the awkwardly-shaped chocolate delivery system, and guaranteed it would be there by the time the first door came a-knockin'.

So far so good ? until something went awry with the tracking number, leaving me to hope their guarantee was still in place, as enquiring at the destination too early would have, of course, spoiled the surprise.

Thankfully, everything aligned just right, and mere minutes after I answered my own cardboard door, I got a photo of the trio excitedly doing the exact same thing at almost the exact same time.

Surprise made and crisis averted.

For everyone with friends and family flung further afield than the GTA dependent on sending out cards and packages this season, not only to spread holiday cheer but maintain valued traditions, I hope you've found workarounds as the strike has bulldozed through some key holiday dates.

Canada Post provides a valuable and largely egalitarian service to this country, and was a unifying force in our nationhood since Canada's first postage stamps were printed in the 1850s. As such, their employees, whether they are postal clerks, sorters, or carriers, have been called upon to continue their work, often in challenging conditions.

We all, of course, have the stereotype in our heads of postal carriers being chased away from on-porch mailboxes by the dog of the house, but as online shopping continues to ramp up, they're laden-down now more than ever and called upon to do so much more than they had been before.

At the same time, as far as I can see, Canada Post hasn't done all they can to stay competitive.

They might be a Crown Corporation, which has made them ubiquitous, but they have never had a complete monopoly on how documents and parcels are delivered in this country.

At the start of the global pandemic, when the vast majority of us pivoted towards online commerce, whether supporting local businesses via their websites when they were unable to open their doors, or doubling down on our argued reliance on the usual online subjects who had the infrastructure in place to keep their goods moving without a blip, I thought this would be Canada Post's time to shine.

Instead of taking advantage of this opportunity to make further inroads into the courier market, they instead posted significant losses, continuing a trend from long before the pandemic, and answered the call by raising prices for their products and services, rather than taking the opportunity to position themselves a cost-effective service for individuals and businesses alike.

At press time this week, there was still no resolution on the labour dispute, leaving the United States Postal Service to announce Monday it was no longer accepting Canada-bound mail until the strike was over, throwing water on an already damp week for cross-border trade, not to mention holiday cheer.

One can only hope the resolution is swift and that the new year brings the service some much-needed soul searching.

That being said, if you're still hoping to receive a gift sent weeks ago from a family member in States or for a friend in Vancouver to receive your masterpiece of a Christmas letter, nobody is going to begrudge you opening up some advent calendar doors a few days early to soothe the worrying soul!