

BROCK'S BANTER: Cry Me a Cryoseisma

By Brock Weir

Last week, I wrote about lessons learned over the past calendar year.

As I noted, I was writing it during the ice storm, a phenomenon which is likely to become a part of our folklore for many years to come. Since then, the lessons have continued to pile up.

Consider the aftermath of the storm for a moment. Its effects made for a very messy holiday season. As others have noted, many lost power and, as a result, many lost full stocks of holiday cheer due to their warmed-up refrigerators and freezers, and were either unexpectedly housebound or forced to make alternative holiday plans.

Although we did not lose power where I live ? my home is directly on the west side of Bayview Avenue between St. John's Sideroad and Wellington Street ? our holiday plans turned out to be somewhat out of the norm, but we dealt with it.

After what turned out to be an unusually quiet Christmas Eve, I stayed up pretty late before joining most other Aurorans getting snug in their beds in either a kerchief or cap. Like many of you, however, the sugarplums dancing in my head were shaken and thrown into the orchestra with the first in a series of loud booms.

Avoiding any mentions of arising clatter, once awake, I'm sure it was a common feeling of thinking to one's self, ?What the hell was that?!? before drifting off once again, only to have the cobwebs blown off the windmills of your mind by one further blood curdling explosion. It was around 3.45 on Christmas Day morning and if you weren't awake with that, you had either taken a sleep aid, a few too many cups of egg nog? or both.

Staggering into our clothes, out our front doors and onto the icy driveways, it was nice to have a Christmas morning tete-a-tete with the neighbours as we did a quick survey of the area to determine just what shook our walls. There were no trees fully down in our area, just the odd branch or two, but my real concern was the PowerStream station just on the other side of my bedroom wall.

It has been a mild cause of concern ever since I first observed a small sink hole starting to form in their gravel about two years ago, a hole which is fed a regular diet of sand and limestone to keep everything above ground and above board.

With no exterior damage, it was the general consensus that something was going on in the power station, but with no smoke emerging from the two silvery buildings, we decided it would just be one more thing on the power supplier's ever-growing to-do list and went back to bed.

After getting up on Christmas Morning, opening presents, and watching the Queen deliver her annual Christmas Message on the CBC, I fired up my computer to see if there was any resolution on the overnight boom.

There wasn't, but what emerged on Facebook and Twitter the morning of were equal parts panic (in posts with an earlier time stamp) and dismay. Some took an academic approach to the matter, while others clearly took inspiration from Chicken Little. Either way, I was somewhat glad we weren't alone and a meltdown on the other side of my bedroom wall probably wasn't imminent.

That night, however, the unlikely source of the boom was trumpeted loud and clear.

Let's be honest ? until the Christmas Eve boom, how many of us here were fully up to speed on a ?Frost Quake? or, to give the phenomenon its full, grand title, ?cryoseisms?? (Or is it ?cryoseisma??)

It was certainly a phenomena new to me and judging by general reaction on Facebook, Twitter and in other online commentary, a phenomena new to most of the general population. In my 28 years as a Canadian winter enthusiast, and in those years there have certainly been days more bitterly cold than what we have experienced over the past few weeks, this is the first time I have ever heard them. Since they have been ?outed?, however, they are occurring at surprising regularity.

To recap, here is an excerpt from an article from CityNews, which was the first to cross my desk.

?A cryoseism, also known as a frost quake, does happen frequently after ice storms but are quite uncommon in the GTA. A frost quake is caused when rain and ice seep down into the soil and then freezes when temperatures drop.?

Chimed in a New Year's Eve blog post from CBC's Your Community Blog entitled '?Rare ?frost quake' phenomenon bewilders Greater Toronto Area residents?: ?Water in the surrounding soil and rocks freezes. As water freezes, it expands, putting pressure on the dirt and rocks. When the pressure build-up is too much, the dirt or rocks will crack and you hear a loud boom. They tend to occur between midnight and dawn, the coldest time of night and are very localized, so residents a few blocks away may not have heard the Christmas Eve or Christmas Day booms.?

So, there you are. No matter how indoctrinated we are in the ins and outs of a Canadian winter, there is always something new and surprising to keep us on our toes. Now, my only concern is, what else are we now going to chalk up to a ?Frost Quake? in the middle

of the night which might actually be a cause for alarm?

GO AHEAD, THE WATER IS WARM

So, someone had to go first and environmentalist Svetla Topouzova is the first person to declare their candidacy for Council in this year's municipal election. Had I not cut one of my 2013 columns down due to space, I might have made \$10 or so, had anyone taken me up on my wager that she would be among those in the running this year. My prediction was made purely on the observation on the sheer number of Council meetings she attended when she didn't have to. Surely no one would sit through them purely for entertainment! There are a few others who have followed suit as observers over the past few months, so it will be interesting to see who among them will join her in the fray.

As I am writing this on Monday morning, nearly 20 people have lined up at Toronto City Hall to challenge Mayor Rob Ford to the City's top job (that is, when the mayoralty is running on full power), but Ms. Topouzova is, so far, the only declared candidate for any of the multiple positions in Aurora up for bid. To all you stragglers, unless your objective is to build suspense or practice the element of surprise, come on in. The water is warm!