

BROCK'S BANTER: Up and into the aih

By Brock Weir

Okay, let's do a headcount.

Did everyone make it through 2016 intact? Okay, now that we've got that out of the way, let's proceed with the business at hand. Happy New Year and welcome to 2017!

I hope that your holidays were everything you hoped they would be, and that your 2017 got off to a healthy, happy and fulfilling start.

Each year it seems people view the transition between years with mixed emotions. Often, there is a degree of sadness that the year is coming to an end, recounting the number of bright spots that had taken place over the previous twelve months, whether it was personal, professional or family milestones, a great opportunity that was seized upon, or just a simple matter of sentimentality.

Then, there are those who greet New Year's Eve with a sense of excitement, not for whatever they have planned that evening to ring in midnight, but the sense of a new beginning and rebirth soon to hand.

I don't know about you, but in my own circle of friends it seems the lead up to 2017 was, on the whole anything but a mixed bag. They wanted 2016 to be one for the history books and were only too eager to show it the door.

I saw their point.

Outside of the aforementioned personal, professional or family milestones and great opportunities that were seized upon, at first blush it seems there were precious few bright spots to go around, whether your year was clouded by the ravages of war overseas, terrorism close to home and abroad, political turmoil around the world, or natural disasters here in Canada.

Those were the big ticket things. Still more found their clouds in the veritable bloodbath 2016 made of too many of our notables, particularly people in the entertainment field that were, in so many cases, gone well before their time.

People often pooh-pooh those who take to heart the deaths of those in the entertainment field, arguing one shouldn't mourn for those you did not know personally. But, it has to be remembered that many of the people who died over the past year were often the voices of a generation and, in some cases, people who resonated with individuals on a deeper level for very personal reasons.

Such stars as Prince and David Bowie, to pick two examples, were individuals who reached generations at levels people can only aspire to, well beyond the music. They embraced their individuality in a way that was aspirational to those clamoring for the courage to embrace just exactly who they are. The same can be said of Carrie Fisher who, far removed from her iconic role as Princess Leia, devoted so much of her life to being a voice for people battling mental health challenges and taking an eraser-tipped lightsaber to combat the stigma that goes with it.

On a personal note, I felt the death of Carrie Fisher far deeper than I ever thought I would. Having gone 31 years without seeing a complete film from the Star Wars franchise (I look forward to your letters telling me the errors of my ways), I was not mourning the loss of Leia (now a General? I'm told) but someone who was able to use her brilliance in such a profound, impactful and hilarious way.

Already down from the death of Fisher, the death of her mother, Debbie Reynolds the very next day was a punch to the gut.

I had the good fortune of crossing paths with Debbie Reynolds when she was in Toronto in September of 2010. Here to perform at the CNE band shell that summer, I happened to be in the right place at the right time post-show to have a brief chat and a photo with the legendary actress and performer.

After brief exchange, which couldn't have lasted more than ten seconds, Miss Reynolds took my shoulders by both hands, turned me around, pointed me in the direction of the camera, and said, "Darling, look up and into the air." (Pronounced "aih" in a transatlantic accent which seemed to have evolved over the decades).

At first I thought that might have just been a trick to get a good photo from her days at MGM, but the more I learned about her and read her own work after the fact, I liked to think it is how she made her way through life; not with her head in the clouds, but with her eyes firmly on the horizon.

Sadly, it seems the horizon became too bleak for her on December 27, but six years on, and still no clearer on just what Debbie meant that summer night, I've decided to make "looking up and into the aih" a personal New Year's resolution.

Despite the year since passed, there is much to look forward to on that very horizon, and opportunities to shape how 2017 will give way to 2018.

Internationally, we have people fascinated by what the world will look like after January 20 and whether Donald Trump will deliver, for better or worse, on what he promised or self-destruct before the year is out.

Nationally, we are marking our Sesquicentennial, an occasion which is sure to give our collective patriotism and sense of identity a shot in the arm.

Locally, we have many opportunities for collaboration, including finally, once-and-for-all deciding what we, as a community, want for the future blank space that is Library Square.

Let's all look up and into the air over the next 12 months and seize the opportunities that come our way to build a strong and vibrant community, continue to forge and shape our national identity for our next 150 years, and be there for others around the world when the world lets them down.