

BROCK'S BANTER: What's the matter with kids today?

By Brock Weir

Kids, I don't know what's wrong with these kids today.
Kids, who can understand anything they say?
Kids, they are disobedient, disrespectful oafs
Noisy, crazy, sloppy, lazy loafers
And while we're on the subject

Kids, you can talk and talk till your face turns blue
Kids, but they still do just what they want to you
Why can't they be like we were, perfect in every way?
What's the matter with kids today?

If the above words are familiar to you ?and maybe you can still hear the jaunty tune accompanying them ? the words of Lee Adams from the hit musical *Bye Bye Birdie* can be considered a capsule in time.

Written in the late 1950s, it captures a very distinct point in North American culture where, just on the cusp of the 1960s, teens were starting to think more radically compared to their comparatively stuffy and starchy parents, whose life- and work-ethic were defined by growing up in a sometimes hardscrabble existence during The Great Depression, living through the Second World War, and making their way in the corporate rat race ? or otherwise finding ways to amuse one's self respectfully despite suburban post-war tedium.

Their kids were growing up with very different ideals; they were ready for change, sometimes radical change, and they were increasingly viewed with distrust by their elders.

But, actually, as we well know, this song doesn't really capture a specific moment of time. Sure, the tune might, but the words describe an age-old conundrum, and one which continues to this day.

Parents of the day who might have identified with the song when it first hit the charts probably liked to push aside the fact their own parents sang a similar refrain when their own kids were getting off on the daring sounds of jazz. Those same parents of the day probably never would have dreamed that their own kids would identify with the song soon enough when their own children started listening to Rap, wearing Hammer pants, and getting things pierced which had never been pierced before.

There was the ?other? and the ?other? was distrusted.

Hey, I had been there myself.

Growing up, I was always described as an ?old soul? ? a term which I loathe because, although accurate, and although it is claimed to be complimentary, it sounds like people view me as a bit of a throwback ? and, as such, when I was going through my own teen years, I never really identified with my peers.

Case in point: Grade 10.

This year, for reasons which are still unclear to me, the brass at my high school decided that this year everyone in this particular grade would share a locker. Perhaps it was a space saving measure, perhaps it was seen as a way of fostering relationships, but, at the end of the day, I was assigned a locker-mate with whom I had next to zero in common.

Whereas I was an odd kid who would be more likely to have a poster of Lucille Ball, for instance, in his locker. I opened ours one day to find a giant poster of weed running the length and breadth of the door.

Now, don't get me wrong, I have nothing personal against marijuana, but it probably wouldn't crack my Top 10 of interior design ideas.

Nevertheless, the grand experiment endured, and so did the lessons that came from it. The so-called ?badass? image my locker mate was trying to project through his poster (yes, badassery through horticulture) ultimately turned out just to be a front and there were more commonalities than not.

That is why I bristle when today's parents ? and yes, even parents who are from my own generation ? trot out this distrust of kids, teens, and ?youths? when they are trying to make a point, invariably trying to drive home a point that is, in the end, railing against change.

We saw this just a few short years ago when Council was tackling the thorny issue of where to locate Aurora's Youth Centre, with

some suggesting this place where youth ?might? congregate ? even though that was its specific purpose ? would be best suited or an industrial area away, far removed from residential neighbourhoods because, essentially, groups of teenagers ultimately mean there is some ?up to no good? afoot.

A year or two later, these same arguments were made by concerned homeowners in the southwest quadrant of Bayview and St. John's Sideroad where planners were playing hot potato over the location of a now flourishing McDonalds. Many opposed to its ultimate placement on Pederson claimed they were concerned about teens congregating at the restaurant and shuddered at the various supposed ills that would come with that.

And yet, those arguments have come to the fore again this month where residents living around the former Highland Gate Golf Course spoke out against various amenities being included in the large park planned for their infill neighbourhood. A particular problem, according to one resident opposed to trail lighting, is worry about ?strangers walking behind our homes in the middle of the night and teenagers being teenagers.?

So, what is a teenager these days? As I get older, I find I am less wary of them than the days when I was one myself.

In this job today, I have the privilege of meeting people from all walks of life, often teens who are doing unlikely things in their community. Some of these teens might be judged by others a certain way based on outward appearances and are often surprised to learn of the good work, social advocacy and environmental activism, to name but three occupations, they are doing in our community.

And yet, provide an environment where two or more might want to get together and all of a sudden people start embracing their inner Paul Lynde.

I believe teens are ? and have always ? received a bad rap, despite their best efforts. If you are opposed to something, be opposed to it, but don't depend on stereotypes to make a point.