

INSIDE AURORA: Going...Postal

By Scott Johnston

Something unusual happened to me last week; I received a letter in the mail.

'Hmph? I get mail all the time?', you probably say.

But this was different.

It wasn't a form letter. There was no printing, typeface, letterhead, labels or 'limited time offers' involved. The paper size was not the standard eight and a half by eleven inches. The envelope didn't have a little window in it.

It was an actual hand written letter on a heavy bond non-white paper, with a real stamp and written return address on the envelope. Bet you haven't had one of those in a while. In fact, unless you have an older family member who lives out of town and has not embraced the internet, or, perhaps before that, the typewriter, I think this would be pretty rare.

In this case, the big surprise is that the letter didn't come from a person from that nostalgic older generation, but someone much younger than myself.

It got me thinking as to what we actually do receive in our supermailbox on a regular basis.

It used to be bills, but those transactions are almost all handled electronically now, including any associated statements.

We do get the odd small package that comes in the mail rather than being couriered to the front door, but that's infrequent.

There are still a few magazines that come this way, but even those are going electronic with tablet versions becoming more accessible.

With the exception of the one noted earlier, the only letters we receive are the rather impersonal form variety, often addressed to 'occupant?' or 'homeowner?'. In the cases where they do try to identify us by name, they usually misspell it, often in the most original ways.

We don't mistakenly receive our neighbours' mail very often anymore, either.

This is likely due less to improved postal efficiency than the fact that like the rest of us in the 21st century, they're getting less hard copy mail, too.

Even that last seasonal holdout, the Christmas card, is more frequently appearing in one's electronic inbox, rather than one's external mailbox.

Of course, the one thing that has not decreased in volume, but grown exponentially, is junk mail. We probably receive 387 mature trees' worth of fliers every year that pretty much all get immediately tossed.

If we had a wood stove, and the space to store all this combustible material, we could probably heat our house each winter with them.

Maybe until they figure out another purpose for it, the Town could offer up the use of the Petch House for this storage.

In the end, if you add up the 'real' mail we receive, this may account for an average of one or two items every week or two.

It wouldn't really be worth visiting the supermailbox for anymore, except if you didn't empty it on a regular basis, the fliers would jam in so tightly that the carrier wouldn't be able to fit in any real mail, if you were actually sent something.

It's no wonder that Canada Post is scaling back home delivery across the country and closing post offices, such as the one here in Aurora. Stamp sales certainly can't be keeping them in business.

We're now so used to the speed of electronic communication, it's not like we're ever going back. It's hard to believe that not that long ago, people waited days or even weeks between written communications. Today, you'd be frustrated if someone didn't respond to an email or text within a few minutes.

Postal delivery truly was snail mail, comparatively speaking.

So, receiving that hand written letter was quite a surprise, and perhaps most telling for how quickly times have changed; it was almost quaint.

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