

"We are all socialists now"

Brian Keelan - September 2020

My very interesting, free-thinking cousin Kurt made that statement back at the beginning of April: just after the US and Canadian governments had announced their massive financial relief programs to help their citizens/voters cope with the economic shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I find it difficult – if not impossible – to argue that point. I also await with great trepidation that day when reality will ultimately rear its ugly head and declare that there is a limit to the amount of money the various governments pursuing this logical yet “socialistic” approach to the economic shutdown will be able to “borrow” in their efforts to keep the “shit from really hitting the fan.” I have no idea what that number is, but I believe there is a number and hopefully somewhere in the bowels of the financial institutions and government “think tanks” somebody knows what that number is and is sharing it with the people who are in charge of all this.

I just hope it’s a big number: one that’s still a long way down the line. I also wonder if it will ever be paid back and by whom.

COVID-19

Looks like it’s going to be around for a while yet. I remember telling my kids back in April that we/they should probably have this whole thing under control by the end of June... at the latest. Okay maybe we lose the NHL and the NBA playoffs but surely baseball and the sailboat racing season would be saved. Okay maybe a shorter season but we can deal with that. And certainly, the new James Bond movie will be out this summer.

Boy was I wrong about all that. COVID-19 is still very much with us: right there waiting to pounce whenever we – as my friend Blacky likes to say – “Let our guard down.”

I have been listening to a lot of podcasts this summer in an effort to try and figure out who knows what is really going on. Overall, I think Canada has done a good job at not just keeping the COVID numbers at bay but also in convincing all of us of the importance of “staying safe.” Mr. Ford has shown surprisingly good leadership qualities.

I think September will be very important. By the end of the month we will either be up and running or back in lockdown. Whether or not that happens, it is up to us... each and every one of us. I keep thinking of my one-word philosophy of life: TryNotToDoAnythingStupid.

On-line classes

As the issue of “what-the-heck-is-going-to-happen-to-our-education-system?” gets closer to D-Day (the day school is supposed to start), I have been listening to a lot of discussion about whether or not the steps taken will be effective as various groups try to determine what is the best way to make things work. I have heard lots of concern by the teachers that they feel on-line teaching from their homes is an “invasion of their privacy.” I agree with them. It is. All the students (along with the all the freaks who can hack into the system and we know there are lots of them) will be looking at them at home teaching in their underwear while (of course), dressed from the waist up.

What I do have trouble with is why they feel they have to keep the teachers at home if the main concern is the ability to control the students. Why don’t the teachers come to the school and teach from there. That’s where all the technology, teaching assets and supplies are. The school will have the teachers in the empty classroom where they will be safe in the bubble of the building with only them in it. (It seems to be working for the NHL.) Social distancing won’t be a problem since they are all adults and there are no students to personally deal with. They can also be supervised by the management to make sure everybody is there and working so that the taxpayers are getting their money’s worth.

I have not heard that proposition put forth so sometimes I wonder why it is that I have to come up with all the good ideas.

Gene Lakusiak (June 1, 1942 – July 29, 2020)

“He was the best athlete I ever saw.”

That was how Ray Germain described Gene Lakusiak. Mike L’Heureux called him, “the most natural athlete I ever saw.” The legend of Gene Lakusiak is etched in the minds of all those who were lucky enough to play with him and unlucky enough to play against him.

When he was 14 years old, the Detroit Tigers were looking at him because he could hit a baseball farther than anyone around. He was a great hockey player: at age 16, he cracked the

Legionnaires lineup. Played three years for them and was on the championship team with Phil Esposito in the 1960-1961 season. That same year he was captain of the Northern Vikings football team. After high school he worked in the Chemical Valley, played for the Legionnaires, the Sarnia Football Junior Knights (who were inducted as a team into the Sarnia Sports Hall of Fame) and took courses at Port Huron Junior College to get his grades in line. He also played hockey there along with Mike L'Heureux, Ray Germain and Steve Burley. Then he turned down an offer from the Detroit Tigers to play in their farm system and accepted a scholarship to play football at the University of Tulsa where he was their fullback.

In the first game he ever played for them he kicked off (he was also a hell of a kicker). That game was against the university of Houston and was played in the brand-new Houston Astrodome. Here is a great piece of Sarnia trivia for you: Gene was the first guy to ever kick a football in a domed stadium. The game was broadcast live on national TV in the US and the announcer said, "This guy kicking off is a Canadian. He's from a place called Sarnia, Ontario." You could just hear all the people who watched that game in Sarnia go, "Awww shit!"

After two years at Tulsa, Gene was drafted by the Ottawa Rough Riders. After one year they traded him to the Winnipeg Blue Bombers where he played for seven years – 2 as a fullback and 5 as outside linebacker. Twice he was voted an All-Star.

After he retired from football, he went into teaching (and coaching). Gene and his wife Lynn (also from Sarnia) were married for 53 years and raised two children. Over the years, whenever I saw Gene back in Sarnia, he loved to tell me about the cottage he and Lynn built on Lake of The Woods.

To find out more, go to YouTube and type in: Cycle on Life – Gene's Ride 2020.

Gene was a rare kind of guy and he will be well remembered by all who had the good fortune to know him.

Alan Fotheringham (August 31, 1932 – August 19, 2020)

About fifteen years ago, Sylvia and I were up in Lion's Head visiting some old – as in longtime – friends. My friend's wife mentioned that her cousin had recently married Alan Fotheringham. Now I had been a huge fan of his back-page stories in Maclean's Magazine. His writing was so popular that it made Maclean's famous for the fact that people read the "back page first." He was known as, "The wicked wit of the west."

I told them, "Boy, I would sure love to be up here when they were here. I'm a big fan."

And so it was that one year later we arrived there around 11 a.m. on Saturday morning. The Fotheringhams arrived around 11:30 a.m. Upon meeting them, the very first thing Alan said to Sylvia was, "Would you please get me a gin and tonic."

Sylvia, being the class act we have all come to know and love, replied, "Why certainly Alan," which was not what I would have said if he'd asked me. Later that afternoon during our cocktail cruise I told him that my favourite of all his "lines" was when he said that, "Jean Chretien was the first Prime Minister in our history who could not speak either of our official languages." We had a lot of laughs over that one and he told us some of his other favourites.

That night was probably the most "Canadian night" I've ever had as we had a long, drawn-out, totally excellent dinner, ably enriched by a few bottles of red wine. Sylvia and I asked Alan lots of questions about all the political people, business tycoons, superstar athletes and other Canadian and International celebrities he had met and written about. Alan enjoyed telling us everything we wanted to know.

A few years later we were seated at his table during the wedding of our hosts son and Alan and Sylvia struck up a long and spirited conversation over their political ideals. Everyone had the feeling after our first meeting that this had to happen and although at times things got quite animated, they both wished to remain in each other's good graces and that's exactly what happened.

Alan liked her more than he did me... but I can live with that. Heck, I like her better than me too.

Update on the Whitey Stapleton Petition

As of this moment we have 1,689 signatures on the petition to have the Sarnia Arena re-named in honour of Pat "Whitey" Stapleton. The goal is to get 2,302 signatures so we still need to get another 613 people to sign. I really do appreciate and am encouraged by your support for this, and I would ask you to just dig a little deeper one more time to help us get this done. Here is how to do that:

On the internet, go to: Change.org. When you get to their website just type "Sarnia Arena" in the search panel. That will take you right to the petition. There you will see a box called: Sign This Petition.

In that box it will ask for your first name, your last name and your e-mail address. Enter that and it's done. Then just pass the link on to anyone else you feel would like to sign. It is NOT necessary to give them any money.

This is a good thing we are doing and a great way to honour one of our own who was such a great representative of the people of Sarnia/Lambton.

Now for the serious part: Football

COVID-19 is simply going to ruin the 2020 football season. Already the Big Ten has cancelled their season. That means no Michigan, no Michigan State and no Ohio State football. Then the Pac -12 cancelled their season: no UCLA, no Southern Cal and no Stanford football. Notre Dame has so far lost only the Western Michigan game but I can't figure out why they'd ever play them anyway. All their other games are still on, but I wouldn't bet that many of them will be played. So far three of the top ten ranked teams have cancelled their football seasons.

I'll bet there's more to come since the bulk of them are in the south and they don't seem to have figured out the advantages of social distancing... yet.

Then there is the NFL. They are just trying to see how far this thing will go before they have to pull the plug. None of the pre-season games are being played. The CFL has cancelled their season so there is no Grey Cup.

This COVID-19 is just ruining everything and what seem to be making it worse is that fact that the Republicans seem to be trying to "will" the COVID-19 virus into submission. Personally, I don't think that's going to work. That's just my opinion. I could be wrong.

But either way: TryNotToDoAnythingStupid.

Please.