

Time-tested truth and understanding



By Nate Smelle

With a pair of deadlines looming heavily each week, time fades away fast. Individual days are absorbed by weeks which inevitably end up blurring together into months, that are also destined for the blender of time. As time flows on, months also disappear into one another, and one begins to establish memories based on significant happenings.

When I first started reporting in this community, I would wait until about two weeks before the Christmas break to start combing through the year's newspapers in search of the biggest stories for the 'Year in Review' edition.

Over time, I have ditched my 'Hail Mary' technique, and developed a habit of noting such moments that leave a mark as I recognize them. Using these notes as a guide to weave together the annual archive has made the process much more enjoyable and enlightening.

Instead of frantically reading through every edition in the office to seek out the moments that matter most, now I simply open up my notebook, find the articles in each edition, and summarize what compelled me to add these stories to my list.

As much as I enjoy compiling the stories featured in our Year in Review, being able to split this process up among our team of reporters over the last few years has made it more interesting for me to read the finished product.

Although we tend to come up with very similar looking lists, there are always at least a few stories which don't make my list, that the other reporters include in their reports.

This year, however, it wasn't the individual stories emerging from the blurred abyss of time that demanded my attention. Instead, while reading through the briefs compiled by our team in 2021, it occurred to me that there was not a single story which in one way or another was not influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since stumbling upon this realization, I read through the briefs again with a different mindset. This time around, I read them as if I was seeing them a decade from now.

Hopefully by then, all that will remain of this mess of sickness, death, and uncertainty that we are immersed in as a result of the pandemic will only linger in our history books. Until then, our generation 'that being everyone alive today' have been tasked by our place in time to overcome this global health crisis.

Moving beyond COVID-19 and into our new reality is not enough though. If we seriously intend to survive as a species, we also need to learn from our mistakes. As the philosopher George Santayana once wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Looking back on 2021 with one eye pointed towards the future, I wonder what our 2020 hindsight in 2031 will define as our "mistakes." The first, and biggest mistake I can see now, is the propensity of the relative few to confuse consensus among the scientific community as a conspiracy to take away our freedom.

Science, as practiced by real scientists - not the three per cent or less that will say anything for an extra dime - is a communal endeavor that depends on verification attained through repeated trial and error. In fact, that is how we attain the glimpses of truth we accept as fact.

Unfortunately, the esoteric nature of science has fostered a challenge that the scientific community itself must overcome, in order to gain the trust of those who prefer blind faith to time-tested truth and understanding.

World-renowned cosmologist Carl Sagan shone a light on this obstacle, when he highlighted how, "We live in a society absolutely dependent on science and technology, and yet have cleverly arranged things so that almost no one understands science and technology. That's a clear prescription for disaster."

The scientific community must address this crisis of understanding among the masses before we can truly get on with building a better world.

Merry Christmas!