

A Delicate Balance

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Did you ever ride a 'Teeter-Totter,' or 'See-Saw' in your youth? Those were the two most common names I knew of for that ubiquitous piece of equipment that could be found in just about any playground but which, as with so many other things these days, has changed significantly in these last few years.

I'm not even sure what you'd call today's iteration? With new safety features, it barely bounces at all and it most certainly doesn't come hurtling down with a hard crash when your 'friend' hops off the other side! Why am I muttering on about playground equipment? Is it mostly because I'm in a reflective mood? No, not really ? it's just that to my mind, the see-saw is such a visually perfect analogy for all that is both good and bad in our community, our province and in our country, and just like when we were kids, finding that delicate balance that creates stability is proving harder and harder to achieve.

As we have seen most recently with the 'freedom' convoys, anti-vaxxer protests and health care workers (and their supporters) counter-protest, there's been a lot of rhetoric, vitriol and even allegations of violence.

Were we to line everyone up on a see-saw large enough to support both sides, I firmly believe all we would see is a jarring, swift-moving up and down motion with little or no effort at striking a balance that would keep the see-saw stable.

The issue isn't that 90% of us aren't trying very hard to create that balance, it's that the 10% seem to derive much more pleasure from violently 'jumping off,' creating wildly fluctuating movement that sends riders hurtling towards space or hurtling towards the ground. They have no fear of the risks involved ? after all, they won't get injured ? they've jumped off! The individuals who have made this freedom convoy their own (have you seen the American flags, noted the mysterious donations from alt-right, American and other questionable sources ? these are by no means truckers) have essentially jumped off the see-saw, wreaking havoc across the country and will eventually disperse only after having caused injury to the rest of us.

Who can we rely on during these difficult times? Well, typically we would look to our elected leaders. The ones we democratically placed our faith in to guide us during times of wild fluctuations and there's no doubt these have been wild times. The problem is that they too are always riding the teeter-totter, struggling to find the balance between ongoing voter support and meeting the needs of the community at large.

It's a delicate balance but ultimately one would think the 'greater good' philosophy would prevail. Sometimes politicians have to make hard choices, like shutting down convoys that have nothing to do with freedom anymore and which are causing irreparable harm to the people of Ottawa and our nation.

Residents are virtually trapped in their homes. Employees cannot attend work and are losing their source of income, with potentially dire consequences. Women leaving domestic violence and living in transitional shelter housing are being further traumatized daily, as are our health care workers and anyone wearing a mask. They are traumatized by the horns, blocked access to health care and groceries, and by endless hecklers on the streets threatening all manner of harm including, 'I'll rip more than that mask off your face.'

The citizens of Ottawa are at the bottom of the see-saw and the 'freedom' convoy are riding high, without consequence. As for our politicians, one seems to have forgotten that Ottawa is in Ontario and instead of taking action, is promising this coming election's equivalent of 'buck a beer' with the hint that license plate sticker requirements will be removed saving all us good 'folks' \$120 bucks a year.

Don't fall for it. Still others in our nation's capital are posing for pictures in the streets, all smiles and thumbs up, buddying up to the protesters. No one, it appears, is striving for balance.

Perhaps that's why I never particularly liked the teeter-totter. I am always striving for balance. I love nothing more than to listen to two sides of a discussion and try to help people find consensus. Even as a kid I enjoyed the challenge of trying to balance that piece of playground equipment exactly equidistant from the ground and sky, particularly challenging if the person opposite me was much bigger or much smaller. To me, the challenge lay in finding the delicate balance and then seeing how long it could be maintained. It's too bad so many others seem to go for the cheap shot ? the quick but fleeting thrill of the takedown ? laughing as their partner on the playground is sent rocketing towards a hard landing. On the one side is democracy and the ?greater good,? and on the other, anarchy. The see-saw is broken.

BTW ? should anyone be interested, the general school of thought around when the see-saw first appeared is this: According to Google ? the source of all knowledge ? in the 17th century young Korean girls were banned from participating in life outside the walls of their personal courtyard, so they invented a mechanism much like the modern day seesaw in order to be able to rise up and see over the walls. Maybe there's something to be said for maintaining an insular perspective?