

Be Better

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Collectively I think our hearts are hurting. Many Canadians are awakening to a truth that some have already known for a very long time. That is, that we can ? and we must ? be better. As a nation, we pride ourselves on being welcoming and inclusive. On being a country that embraces and values multiculturalism, but do we? Or are we just being ?polite?? Do we merely practice the social niceties, smiling and nodding and saying the inevitable and very Canadian ?sorry? when we get too close to someone in the supermarket? All the while, hiding underneath is our true inner voice, the one that says ?I'm not racist but??. Because if you do, my fellow Canadians, if you ever have to add the word ?but? to a statement, then I've got news for you, you're harbouring a racist thought. We must be better.

It began, if we search far enough back in our memories, with crimes against Asian Canadians who were somehow being held responsible (by some) for the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. ?Only in America,? we said and smugly blamed Donald Trump, til we saw news footage of a woman being verbally assaulted on a Toronto subway and another of a racist attack on a TTC bus. Similar attacks followed and a friend of my son's, at university, made a documentary for school clearly demonstrating first hand how these microaggressions continue to this day. Be better than this.

It escalated recently with the discovery of 215 Indigenous CHILDREN buried in an unmarked grave and while that number continues to climb daily and some have called for a National Day of Mourning, there is still much work to be done. We can start by not just acknowledging the Truth and Reconciliation Report but actioning it. We can go to every residential school and help to uncover the truth now and we can teach Indigenous history, properly and fully, in our schools. Oh yes, and I'll say it again ? louder for the people in the back ? we can get clean water to Indigenous communities! Please Mr. Trudeau ? be better!

Most recently (and certainly not forgetting about the attack on a Quebec mosque in 2017) a Muslim family was mown down by a white supremacist who has rightly, now also been charged as a terrorist. It appears he chose this family at random, presumably only ?identifiable? as Muslims by their choice of clothing and the colour of their skin, killing four of the five members of a family who were merely out enjoying a walk together. Try to imagine this. Imagine looking out your window, at your neighbourhood and the sun and the summer heat shimmering off the pavement and deciding, as a family, to get some fresh air. And then, being deliberately killed simply because of the colour of your skin and perhaps too, the style of your clothing. This man judged bright, beautiful people simply by their outward appearance. He killed a PhD candidate, a sister, a mother and a father and left a young boy an orphan ? we can and we must - be better.

How about Pride month ? are you supportive? I see streets being painted in bright rainbow colours and flags flown including in our own downtown Bolton and outside of Town Hall. These are good things. But I also hear this: ?I don't care if you're gay or whatever but do you have to flaunt it??

There's that ?but? again! First the dismissive ?gay or whatever? which clearly implies how little you understand and then the ?but.? How about this instead: don't flaunt your heterosexuality! Don't make out like a couple of hormonal teens in front of a seniors residence. Don't wear revealing clothes like crop tops and short shorts. Don't hold hands when you go for a walk. What's that you say? Calling out such behaviour would be discriminatory? Exactly. Love is love. Be better.

Imagine a world where all you have to do is be better. Just be a little bit better each day. All you have to do is be nice. Be nice to everyone you interact with. Hold the door, don't cut someone off in traffic, donate to the food bank or your local shelter, do a random act of kindness, help your neighbour, stand up for a person you see being mistreated, or stand up and call for action when you don't see something being done right. If you don't have the capacity, availability or bandwidth to do anything extra like to march or join a committee or donate thousands of dollars that's ok, just individually, be better.

Be a better person on the phone, online, on social media. If each one of us just did better, one small thing ? just did better in our

individual actions as we move through each day, just think how that might help to make the world a better place, one person at a time. Imagine a whole world where everyone just tried to ?be better.?