

But. It doesn't have to be a dirty word.

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There is no 'but' we are told, because using 'but' in a sentence negates everything that was said before its use. It implies that 'but' is a bad, or dirty word. But, and I've been thinking about this a lot in the wake of much of what is happening in our world today, I think it's too simplistic to simply say that one shouldn't use the word 'but,' or that it's bad. After all, there are also many other words that mean something similar to 'but,' and for the purposes of this column, I want to suggest that none of them should have the power to dismiss, or negate, that which came before them.

Instead, I invite you to consider this alternative; that 'but' could simply be a means of opening the door to conversation, perhaps even a civilized debate. Something that seems woefully lacking in our world at the moment.

Currently, it seems there are only 'sides' to be taken, without dialogue or conversation, and as a result, 'but' has become its own divisive word. Most recently, we saw this in the aftermath of the murder of Charlie Kirk.

Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people, exclaimed his death was terrible, but also, that his policies were reprehensible. That led some folks to assume that other folks felt Charlie Kirk's death was somehow justified. Of course it wasn't. Murder is murder. We can agree that his death was terrible while disagreeing with the sentiments he expressed. It doesn't mean the use of the word 'but' negates the assertion his death was terrible at all. Rather, I posit that using the word 'but' is an opportunity to open a door to the kinds of deep (and difficult) conversations about what Mr. Kirk stood for and why they have become such a flashpoint for all that is happening in America (and frankly, around the world) today.

I would also suggest that if you are truly hung up on the use of the word 'but,' consider what the sentence 'there is no justification for murder, but his policies were reprehensible' looks like if instead we say: 'there is no justification for murder, however, his policies were reprehensible.'

What if instead we massaged the wording even further and said: 'alternatively, while there is no justification for murder, we must consider whether his policies were considered reprehensible or not.'

You might even hear sentences that sound a bit like this: 'although we cannot justify murder under any circumstance' or, 'despite there being no justification for murder' (insert your opinion here). You get the idea. The italicized, bolded words are a few of the multitude of words we could use in place of 'but' yet ultimately, they point to the same end result. That is, not as you may have been taught, that using words like 'but,' or 'alternatively,' or 'however,' dismiss your original statement, but rather (use intended) there are multiple ways to state a position from which one can then have a discussion, whether the topic is divisive or otherwise.

An example more pertinent to Caledon, and certainly topical with Council meeting this past Tuesday to discuss it, is the idea of Gentle Density. You might hear, 'I believe in gentle density, but only if it is done well,' which is the same as saying, 'I believe in gentle density, however, we must ensure it is done with care.' Neither of the 'qualifiers' in either sentence takes away from the fact that we need to find affordable alternatives to meet the current lack of affordable housing supply. Instead, they simply ask that we also consider when and how gentle density is implemented. It invites us to have the conversation that gentle density (allowing up to four 'ARUs' 'Additional Residential Units) on a property, must be done in a way that ensures it meets the needs of every Caledon resident, both current and future.

Gentle density is no doubt, for some, a divisive topic. Certainly not as fraught as the cold-blooded killing of a person no matter what they espoused, yet it is one that has the potential to divide neighbour against neighbour or even neighbourhood against neighbourhood.

Many of us have young adults living at home far beyond the time that they (or us!) want them to be, and limited, to virtually no

access to affordable housing is one of the reasons why.

However, despite general agreement that young people have nowhere to go, I've been to meetings where people agree it's an issue, but they don't want certain types of housing in their neighbourhoods. While at first glance this smacks of ?NIMBYism,? I hope instead that it encourages residents to find out more about gentle density and then to express any concerns appropriately, either at, or to, Council and/or their Councillor.

Gentle density is just one of many possible solutions to the housing crisis we are in, but only if it is done with care and caution. There's nothing bad, wrong or dirty about inserting ?but? into the conversation. It's how we move forward after we have done so that matters most.