

Families first

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Traditionally this is the time of year when our hearts are filled with 'peace and goodwill towards our fellow man' and if we're lucky 'also with happy, family-filled, traditional holiday celebrations. We may even start thinking about the new year ahead and what changes we'd like to make in our future. Getting healthy (or healthier,) reconnecting with friends and family, perhaps a career change or a commitment to look after your own mental well-being. However you celebrate at this time of year, more than anything I believe it to be a time where we should be focussed on keeping the mantra of 'family first' always at the forefront. Whatever your family dynamic is and whomever you consider family - don't forget that these people are the reason for the holiday season. There's a lot going on at this time of year. Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle that you forget why you're hustling!

It hasn't been a stellar year in my house. A series of 'one thing after another,' events, some small but annoying and others very large and all-consuming, have me waiting not so patiently to kick 2019 to the curb. It's a 'Sayonara, and don't let the door hit you on the way out' kind of feeling. I am so done with 2019 that for me, the start of a new year will be my true Christmas present, one that I can't wait to unwrap hoping it is filled with positivity, less stress, better health and frankly 'far fewer dramas. With that said, I am acutely aware that there are many families wishing for so much more: a cure for cancer, not a career change but simply a chance at employment, perhaps even something as simple as a friendly visit from one of our local Caledon Meals on Wheels volunteer members delivering a hot, nutritious meal. I'm sure some are wishing for a Christmas miracle. I've been following two stories recently, one local and one from Ohio, where children are fighting for their very survival and for those families, I'm sure the ONLY thing on their holiday wish list is the health of their children. #goreesego #emmastrong That these two young people are fighting for their lives and surrounded by a family and community who support, pray, provide meals and kindness, and attempt to bolster their spirits, are true examples of how we should all choose to behave at this time of year.

When you are out there shopping, whether it's for Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa or other holidays that take place just before or after those mentioned, think kindly of your fellow shoppers. Remember we are all out there with the same goal in mind; to find that perfect something to share with a loved one, to purchase food to create a lovely holiday meal celebrated with our family and friends. If you wander in to every jam-packed mall or grocery store thinking thoughts full of positive intention, the hustle and bustle somehow seems less overwhelming. Choosing to put a smile on your face truly impacts others and you may find more people smiling back at you. If you are lucky enough to score an excellent deal on a coveted item your child/spouse/friend really wants 'buy two and donate one. Our local community service agencies like Caledon Community Services, Family Transition Place, Meals on Wheels, The Salvation Army and others will thank you. It's not just our own families we need to think about at this time of year 'it's all families.

Remember too amongst all the noise to listen for the noise that matters most. All my young adult children plus an extra addition to our family this year were all home at the same time this past weekend. If you're a mother I am sure you can appreciate how rare an occurrence this is. We spent some time watching a holiday movie and we even cut down a tree for the first time in years. I enjoyed every minute of it. What I enjoyed most however, was that one time I was working away in the kitchen, listening to the ebb and flow of the conversation taking place two rooms away. I couldn't hear what was being said and I'm glad. What I could hear was the tone of voice, the inflection, the animation and the occasional quiet whispering of three young adults who were spending some much needed time together and without a parent listening in, interfering or asking for help setting the table. I was happy and content just to hear them talking. It occurred to me that times change so much over the years. When they are babies, sometimes you just want the crying to stop. As toddlers, the tantrums drive you to drink! The teen years make you question your sanity and perhaps even why you ever had kids in the first place. Then, bridging the gap between teen and adulthood 'you start to appreciate the little things 'like a conversation amongst family, the kind of 'noise' that matters most.

Do something good for your fellow Caledon citizens. Large or small doesn't matter it's the gesture that counts. Keep your family first and foremost in your mind. Time spent with family is more valuable than any present and many a person will tell you their favourite memories of the holiday season often don't involve what was under the tree but rather, the memory of the outing when you all went

together to pick it out from the garden centre or to cut it down from a tree farm. They remember the time you all got in to an overly exuberant and raucous game which resulted in small grape throwing incident, the grape landing firmly (in a once in a lifetime shot) between Great Grandma's glasses and her eye* These are the things of which memories are made. It's not always easy, and the holidays are stressful to be sure, but a ?family-first? attitude (at home and in our community) might just help get you through it. Focus on what really matters and Reese ? I haven't met you - but you and your family are pretty darn inspiring. #goreesego