

Grateful

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I know Thanksgiving, traditionally a time for expressing gratitude, was just a couple of weeks ago, but with so much going on in the world right now it just seems like a really appropriate time to talk about being grateful again. Why? Because for those of us living locally, to be reminded that all is good in our little corner of the world, is important. The fall colours are bright and the sunlight beautiful and even if a tad chillier in the mornings, Caledon is lovely and for that, we should be really, really grateful. No matter your trials and tribulations (recognizing some carry many burdens) we are in a free country and in this little corner we are not at war, not facing famine, disease nor persecution of any kind. So, despite my tendencies toward complaints about highways and greenbelts and the state of local politics, I'm thinking I should be grateful - because right now there are many in the world who have very little to be grateful about at all.

Our sky is not raining missiles. If there's rain, it's watering the trees, cleaning out the gutters and replenishing the land, all simply part of a cycle that sustains us, not one that is trying to eliminate us.

The ground is not shaking both above and beneath us as we huddle in a shelter. Instead, we're sheltered in a home with windows that offer a view of sky or trees, of flowers or sunlight, of green grass or even just busy roads and a patch of concrete but it's a view that shows people safely going about their daily lives.

The earth is not scorched, our harvest hasn't been decimated by troops or ground warfare, or extreme climate change and our children are at school rather than fleeing for their lives from starvation, ammunition, tanks, terrorists or invading armies who seek to expand and occupy historically disputed lands around the world.

Even if we don't have the bounty we might hope for, and our own medical system leaves much to be desired due to chronic underfunding, there are community organizations and services in place who try their hardest to support us with food, donations, subsidies, clothing and many other forms of assistance. Most importantly of all, we are not relying on international aid agencies like the Red Cross or Doctors Without Borders for the absolute basic necessities of life like food, water and medical assistance.

Chances are, your neighbour does not hate you, at least not actively enough to seek your annihilation. I'm not choosing sides here in any of the world's current major conflicts, I'm simply acknowledging that in Canada, we have the 'luxury' of hate without the fear of its deadly consequences unlike what those in other parts of the world are experiencing.

Speaking of hate - just simply this - why? When my 'littles' were actually little we used to tell them, 'hate is a strong word, an unnecessary one.' We'd explain that you can dislike something, it's ok to not be a fan of Brussels sprouts or kale, but hate is too strong a word for almost any circumstance. I still feel this way today. True hate is almost always anger, thinly disguised as a valid emotion. It's an attitude, a choice we make and one that often arises from misinformation and a lack of willingness to listen and to learn. It arises from conditions like systemic poverty, colonization and sustained injustice. It is, at its core, a fundamental flaw of humanity in general, one that actively relies on us to forget our shared humanity. That which makes us more alike than different. That which makes us human.

I'm reminded of a song in which the words ask: 'What if God was one of us, just a stranger on the bus, trying to make his way home?.' What if indeed? Even if you don't believe in God, substitute the name of any other person (or deity) who has meaning to you and ask yourself; 'What if this person was just trying to make their way home after a hard day at work?.' What if home meant there was a family awaiting, perhaps even dependent upon, that person's safe arrival? What if, rather than perpetuating historical divisions, we recognized our shared humanity first? That we are all just trying to make our way home? What if the 'what if?' questions focussed instead on what's possible in a world where we are all just humans first? Until that day comes, be grateful that Caledon is where you get to call home.