

If Only

by SHERALYN ROMAN

If only we lived in a world where who you loved didn't make you feel unsafe, unwelcome or, as in the case in some countries, unlawful. Falling in love is hard enough and when two people do find love, why on earth should it matter to anyone else with whom they found it? June is Pride month and there is no better time than now to ask ourselves what would it look like in the world if all love was accepted and celebrated? If only.

While still a Justice Minister in 1967, Pierre Elliot Trudeau proposed to decriminalize homosexuality and became widely known for quoting: "there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." No place indeed. Yet here we are some 50+ years later still defending the rights of the 2SLGBTQ+ community to fall in love, marry, heck even raise a family. You know, just like any human being might like to do someday. Pride month exists because even though Trudeau's Omnibus Bill was passed two years before the Stonewall Riots in New York, very little changed here at home in the bill's immediate aftermath. Sadly, some might argue, in the minds of many, very little has changed even now.

Pride month exists as a direct acknowledgement of, and an uprising against, the ongoing discrimination and harassment faced by members of the gay community that culminated in those aforementioned Stonewall Riots of 1969. Today, Pride Month continues as a celebration of acceptance; a recognition of equality, and as an educational tool reminding us of both the contributions, and the history of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Perhaps most importantly, however, Pride Month presents us with an opportunity to continue raising awareness about how damaging homophobia was, and still can be, both here at home, and in many countries around the world.

In any relationship, loving someone calls for us to ignore the little idiosyncrasies. Loving someone sometimes requires us to suspend harsh criticism, to work on our communication with one another, and to foster acceptance instead. Loving someone is occasionally about forgiveness, and loving someone is about safety - the sense that someone else has your back and will provide a safe place for you to land when you topple and celebrate when you succeed. Sometimes, loving someone is just a warm hug or a caring hand placed on your own as you chat about your day. It's about our humanity. If only we lived in a world where everything required of us to truly love someone was equally applied to how we encourage and celebrate each and every other human being's right to find that kind of love for themselves.

If only we lived in a world where the more than 60 countries who still criminalize homosexuality didn't exist, or in a world that would bring enlightenment to 12 of those same countries who can still legally impose the death penalty as punishment against those found guilty of private, consensual, same-sex activity. Yes, the death penalty! It is appalling to me that such state-sanctioned hatred exists. Perhaps even worse is that this hatred is often fuelled by various interpretations of some members of many of the world's major religions. These are people who, despite their faith's emphasis on loving one another in recognition of our deeper understanding of the unity of all mankind, continue to single out members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community for simply loving another human being.

Pride Month exists as a reminder to be "proud of who you are no matter who you love." It's an opportunity to celebrate. In Caledon, rain didn't dampen the festivities of a June 2 Pride family picnic hosted by IDEA Caledon, Caledon Pride and supported by a number of community agencies and businesses.

Taking place soon is a Queers and Beers event scheduled for June 20 and happening at GoodLot.

Allies can show their support by attending these and similar events in Caledon or around the GTA. Allies can also show support by placing a Pride flag (or two!) outside your home or business, or by donating to an organization that supports the 2SLGBTQ+ community. You can choose to be an ally in both your words and your deeds. If you have a platform and a following (and with social media, who doesn't these days) use it to spread joy and positivity not hate, fear and judgement. If only we lived in a world

where the simple act of loving someone, and being in love, mattered more than who the person we loved was. We're getting there, but with the rising tide of right-wing ideologies in some corners of the world, including just south of our borders, it's incumbent upon all of us to stand up, protect and be proud - whether as an ally, or a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. #LoveisLove.