

It's hard to think like Mr. Rogers

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Possibly one of the kindest humans, and not just on TV, Fred Rogers left at least a generation or two with the tools and resources needed to practice kindness, think good thoughts and help thy neighbour. Simple lessons like when you're in a crisis, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping,' still resonate today. Well, we're in a crisis alright, but I'm not sure where or who the helpers might be and that has me thinking, 'it's getting harder and harder to think like Mr. Rogers.'

It's doubtful an impassioned plea from some local columnist will reach the ears of Donald Trump, but I sure wish it could. I'd tell him we are not now, nor will we ever willingly become the 51st state of America. Despite Mr. Trump's claims, promises of lower taxes don't equate to a healthcare system that easily bankrupts individuals who have the misfortune to get sick. His promise that we'd have 'more protection' belies the sacrifices of thousands of Canadian men and women who already fought for our freedoms, in multiple conflicts and particularly during the two World Wars, wars we joined long before America entered either one I might add. This same 'protection' Mr. Trump, presumably based on your military might, is meaningless if it means our children are afraid to go to school lest they be taken down by an assault weapon, a commonplace occurrence in America but a distinctly unlikely one here.

Further, when that protection extends only to men, while women 'especially pregnant ones' are expendable, you can shove your protection in a place Mr. Rogers would never use his out-loud voice to describe. You claim you have all the resources America would ever need to keep your economy going? Guess what, Mr. Trump, so do we and last time I looked, you actually do need some of what we have. That's why we've been trading partners all these years. That's 'partners,' as in part of 'an undertaking with others with shared risks and profits,' not where one partner is ' beholden to' the other.

I'm afraid no amount of cajoling or calming by Mr. Rogers-type euphemisms would lessen my concern about the types of 'jokes,' and 'negotiating tactics' that Trump is engaging in. I abhor the man on a visceral level, but his needling is working to some degree. It's purposefully designed to get under our skin and to cause us to question the capacity of those we should be relying upon right now to help protect Canadians. Belittling our Prime Minister, heckling from his Truth Social accounts and lumping us together with other countries are each designed to make us feel small (and perhaps therefore) in need of the so-called protection he promises. Right now, I need to hear from the people Mr. Rogers would have called the helpers, in this case our politicians, who should be willing and able to stand up to tyranny on our behalf. Because make no mistake, that's what this is 'it's the onset of tyranny in America and Trump wants to spread his use of cruel, unreasonable and arbitrary power and control over us. My guess is that's because he knows America doesn't actually have all the resources it needs and he no longer wants to pay for ours in trade, but rather to simply extract it from us through 'ownership.' It's not a 'beautiful day in the neighborhood' when one neighbour is trying to assert control over all the others.

On a more local level, who do we look to for support in our ongoing battle against the tyranny on our roads? It appears it sure as heck isn't our local MPP. She's been out and about town recently, celebrating a few store openings and ribbon-cuttings, but as far as addressing more serious issues? We've heard nothing. Our own Mayor sent Sylvia Jones' office a letter over two months ago requesting support for this issue, one 'that impacts the quality of life for our residents' yet as far as we know, a response has not been forthcoming. Perhaps, at least for Caledon and area residents it won't matter what Trump does to us because we won't be around to witness it. There's a good chance we'll have been injured, permanently disabled or killed on our roads because there are no helpers coming to address our traffic nightmare.

We need Mr. Rogers now more than ever. Ironically, it's possible Trump and his minions would look upon Mr. Rogers in his sweater and clean-cut hair as a 'good, Christian man,' an example of how to live a life of straight, white, male, Republican virtue. I think it's the opposite. Mr. Rogers would have welcomed everyone into his home and, in fact, it was he who broke the colour barrier on TV by showing himself and 'Officer Clemons,' an African-American, sharing space in a pool together at a time when pools were still largely segregated. I believe Mr. Rogers would welcome members of all marginalized communities and support a country like ours, one that cares for its citizens through health care and social welfare and one where every person should feel free to express who they

are. Mr. Rogers' America recognized "We all have different gifts, so we all have different ways of saying to the world who we are: and that, "When we love a person, we accept him or her exactly as is." *

Trump's America, not so much. Canadians want no part of it.

We need more Mr. Rogers in the world ? or at least more support from people he would have called "the helpers." In the absence of politicians willing to step up, it looks like doing the right thing, and helping one another, will have to come from each one of us, Canadians banding together as individuals to support one another as a whole. We've done it before, and we even defeated America in the process (War of 1812, if you need the reminder) so let's do it again, whether we have help from those who should be there for us or not. Oh Canada ? won't you be my neighbour and together we'll stand on guard for thee.

*I like to think Fred Rogers, already ahead of his time and with the benefit of today's more enlightened understanding, would have embraced current inclusive gender terminology.