

It's that time of year ?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I don't usually reprise columns. There may, on occasion, be similar themes, what with all the challenges facing Caledon right now, but a full reprint of a previous column would be unusual. That said, a partial thematic reprisal is a whole different story so here we go! I'll leave it to you dear reader, to distinguish the old from the new.

It's that time of year, both celebrated and dreaded, depending on your perspective. School starts late this year, many of you no doubt feeling you've had (or needed) this extra week in order to adequately prepare. For parents and caregivers, it's generally a great time of year while kids likely have mixed feelings about it. Both scenarios might be true for teachers! It's 'back to school' time. No doubt this also means this coming weekend will be a busy one for many families whether it's moving your young adult to university, doing some back to school shopping with the little ones, or simply enjoying one of your last cottage or camping trips. While the theme is common, I'm also bringing back this 'oldie, but goodie' because a certain paragraph or two really seemed to resonate with parents and generated a larger than normal amount of feedback. I'm pretty sure the sentiments are just as true this year as any other.

Let's start with what's different. Last year Swan Lake was on the agenda, this year it's a municipal election, and teacher bargaining. Don't panic! A strike isn't imminent but negotiations will (eventually) take place because contracts expired this past Tuesday, August 31. With one dispute about how the bargaining will take place already on the table, it remains to be seen whether Minister Calandra proceeds in good faith anytime soon.

Here's what is the same. Last year a protest was being organized by the CCRSA, giving residents a chance to actively participate (with others across the province) in expressing grave concerns about trucks, licensing, illegal trucking yards and the Driver's Inc 'training' and business models. While this year there may not be a protest in the works, the issues are still front and centre and a petition is currently making the rounds in Caledon so it can be presented in the legislature when politicians finally go back to work in October.

Here's what else hasn't changed. For all the parents sending their littlest family member off to school for the first time, we wish you courage and strength to walk away from your little one, no doubt with a tear or two in your eye. You've nurtured and carried them through these first four years of life and now it's time to expose them to the world (and to germs!) You can do it. Kindergarten teachers are some of the most skilled professionals in education, gifted in helping children transition from home or daycare, to full time education - they've got this.

For all those starting high school, it's a whole different kind of angst and with the addition of social media I don't envy you or the parents and caregivers you rely on for support. There will be challenges, but high school is also often the time when you first meet the people who may well become your friends for life. It's a time you can begin to explore what kind of future you envision for yourself by taking courses that are of interest, not just part of the mandatory curriculum. You may even branch out by joining a club, an advocacy group, a sports team, or by learning a new skill or taking part in arts-based programming.

Next, for those parents who are sending young adults off to university - well - see the comments above about kindergarten. You've kept them safe, fed and clothed for the past 17 or 18 years and now it's time to trust that everything you've done has actually rubbed off on them and that they will remember how to stay safe, feed themselves and how to wash their own clothes! At least these days there are ways for you to easily stay in touch with your kids, unlike when I went off to a school almost three hours away with nothing but a shared access, rotary dial phone in the hallway of the dorm. Mind you - whether your child answers your frequent texts or repeated requests for a Facetime call is debatable. Like I said in reference to kindergarten, I wish you the courage and strength to walk away from your young adult, no doubt with a tear or two in your eye, just don't let them see it!

Finally, to all of this I will now add that sometimes, and not necessarily just in September, you might face an even harder 'goodbye' as your 'littles' are not only bigger, but fully-grown, capable adults themselves. Now, however, the same feelings of watching them

leave are magnified by about a million as that now married ?child? packs up a U-Haul and moves to another province to begin their next adventure. That same feeling exists too, even when you know they'll return, but your other ?child? is currently wandering around the world on a self-funded, post-graduation trip and you're trying to balance the constant worry with the joy that they are truly experiencing life writ large. Yes, there's a tear or two in my eye, but mostly tears of joy.

I'll end with this, a blend of both the previous column I mentioned, and some new material.

Teachers, if you don't already know how much I love you, let me remind both you, and every parent out there who ever complained about teachers while lasting only three whole days teaching their own kids during the pandemic, you are an amazing group of humans. Every day you welcome far too many children into underfunded classrooms courtesy of Doug Ford. (On that note Mr. Ford, your \$750 to be spent at the American owned company Staples, doesn't pass the ?Captain Canada? sniff test.) Students come into the classroom with varying degrees of support required, and teachers, you do your best to ensure they are safe, secure, supported, and taught the basics, all while possibly having some fun too! Good luck this year and to all returning and new students - especially those marking milestones like kindergarten, middle school, high school or post-secondary education.

As for the rest of us, it's September. Help do your part to ensure all kids, teens and young adults get to and from school safely. Keep an eye out for the yellow school bus when it stops - they really aren't that hard to see ? and for goodness' sake, remember it is against the law to pass them when the lights are flashing!