

# Pride Month

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I've promised in the past and will continue to maintain that I will always acknowledge and celebrate Pride Month. After all, what's not to celebrate? Love, family, friends, and a world where we all just simply accept one another for who we are regardless of colour, race, religion, ethnicity and yes, sexual orientation.

This simple acknowledgement of being human is represented by a rainbow flag full of all the beautiful colours we see naturally occurring in this wonderful world of ours. As a simple piece of fabric billows in the breeze it's a beautiful symbol of a movement, and of acceptance. Or is it?

Unfortunately, a flag is often the most divisive scrap of material you'll ever come across.

Flags come in all shapes and sizes representing nations, specific causes, unity and peace, trade unions, or even businesses and non-profits, yet it seems the simple act of raising a flag invites some of the very worst behaviours in some people to emerge.

What a world we live in and right now, that world only seems to be getting worse with those on the far-right feeling more emboldened every day to spew hatred, and in some cases even violence, towards those in the LGBTQIA+ community.

This backward slide is manifesting itself in a number of ways both locally and globally. Companies, particularly large US based organizations, are bailing on sponsorships of local Pride related events. Here at home, Pride celebrations in Toronto have been impacted by both Google and Home Depot withdrawing their support completely and another large organization, Merck Canada, a pharmaceutical company, reducing their contribution amounts.

Kojo Modeste, Executive Director of Pride Toronto, has also said "other sponsors, namely Nissan Canada and Adidas, have also not renewed their sponsorships, while The Abnormal Beauty Company and Tim Hortons have lowered their contribution amounts."

It's been suggested that much of this is a reflection of America's walking back of DEI initiatives.

It's wrong there, and it's certainly wrong here.

Pride7, an affinity group of "independent, non-governmental individuals that work to create policy recommendations," and which include organizations like Egale Canada, are working to "promote and protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people among G7 member states."

With the upcoming G7 meeting taking place in Alberta in just a few weeks, they are "calling on top government officials to meaningfully advance LGBTQ2S+ rights," noting that "Even in the world's most advanced economies, 2SLGBTQI rights are under threat," according to Helen Kennedy, Executive Director of Egale.

"Rising hate, disinformation, and policy rollbacks show that progress is not guaranteed. G7 leaders must take this seriously " by listening to LGBTQIA+ voices, adopting the Pride7 Communiqué, and recognizing Pride7 as an official part of the G7 process."

It would seem now, more than ever, such efforts are very, very necessary.

Locally, this upcoming weekend our neighbours in Orangeville will host Celebrate Your Awesome, a weekend-long Pride event full of fun activities and plenty of entertainment. Sadly, it looks like all the nasty voices are coming out of the woodwork to comment on it.

I've been told again and again not to engage in a thought war in an echo chamber because it's a waste of time, but at what point do we stop letting the hateful comments slide and fight back? You don't have to be rude, just ask a very basic question of our fellow community members: where is your sense of common humanity? We are all just humans trying to exist in this world. What happened to some of you that you have so much hate in your heart directed towards one group of people?

We cannot go backwards.

My hope for this weekend's celebration, for the Pride Toronto celebrations and for the flag that represents Pride, is that communities gather in celebration of the fact that Love is Love.

It really is that simple.

Let the flag be a representation of acceptance, and let Canada be an example to the world of that philosophy - locally, and on the world stage at the G7 summit.